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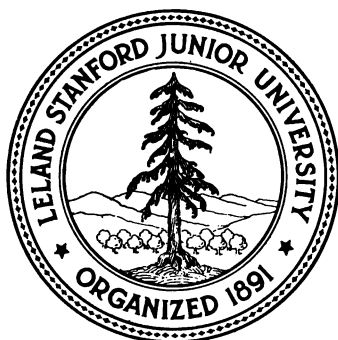
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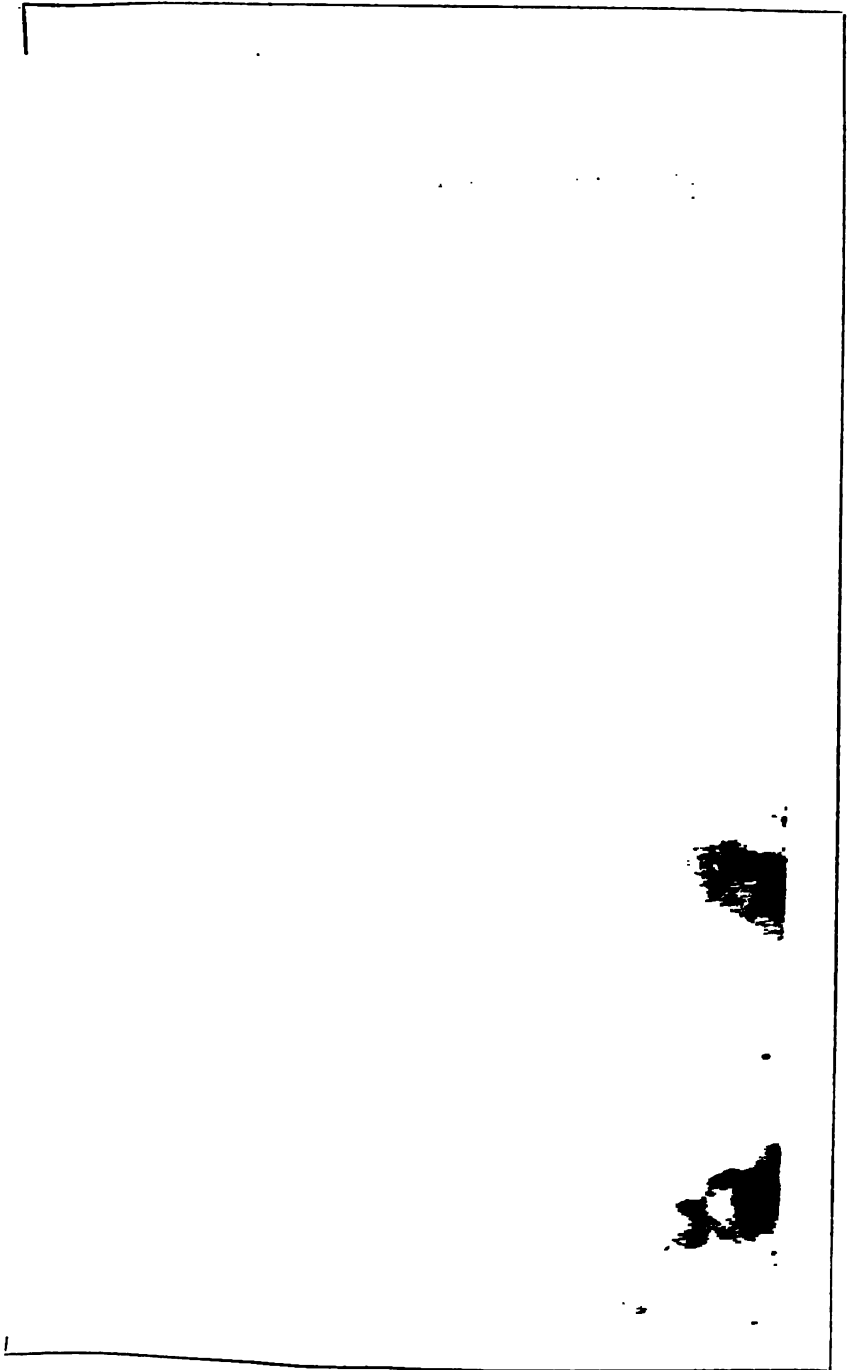
L. D. M. 1894

— I can pretend to nothing, as
a critic - dear Miss Reed, but as one who
listened to your Play with deep interest
I can assure you, that I think very
highly of your production - and wish
it all success —

Yours friend

D. P. Madison.

Washington
March 19th 1842 }



MVR



1



2



DRAMATIC POEMS

BY

HARRIETTE FANNING READ.

BOSTON:
WM. CROSBY AND H. P. NICHOLS,
111 WASHINGTON STREET.
1848.

MVR

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TO
MRS. JAMES K. PAIGE,
AND
THE MANY OTHER FRIENDS TO WHOSE ENCOURAGEMENT I AM
INDEBTED FOR THE SUCCESSFUL COMMENCEMENT OF
MY ENTERPRISE, I VENTURE TO
DEDICATE THIS
VOLUME
IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THEIR
AID AND SYMPATHY.



INTRODUCTION.

It is customary for persons, on first presenting themselves for enrolment in the motley ranks of authorship, to offer to those dreaded inspectors, the critics, some reason for appearing before them, some excuse for deficiencies, which may propitiate or soften those guardians of the public taste. In adopting this usage, I will endeavour to be concise. It has been said that the world is indebted for great works to "the pressure of want without, and genius within"; but to the first clause of the above-cited inspiration, and to a love of publicity, I believe it is conceded that we owe a large portion of the literature of the nineteenth century; by sufferance and custom, the former has come to be received as a valid plea for admission into the army of self-tormentors, ycleped authors. I can present no other.

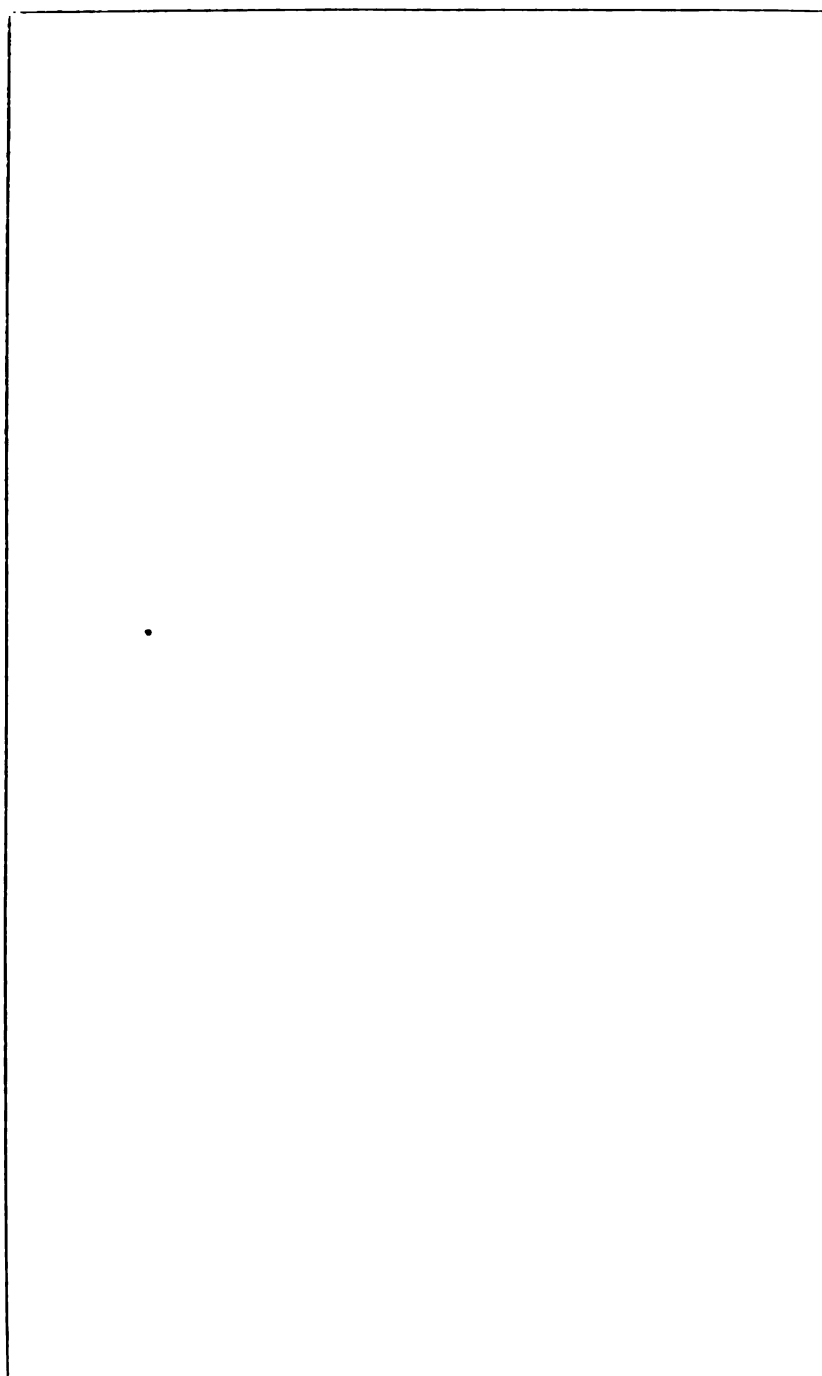
I will not commit the mistake of offering many statements in palliation of the crudeness of these performances;—it is to personal friends alone that we

can look for sympathy or patience with such details ;— one only shield will I venture to place between their defects and deserved censure, which is, that these plays were written between the age of twenty and twenty-three, a period at which much literary power or finish is not expected even of the stronger sex, with their superior opportunities of thought and study. With this excuse (which, if not well grounded, must vanish before the first glance of fair investigation) I will intrude no longer on the attention of the courteous reader, than to express here, as in my Dedication, my heartfelt sense of the exceeding kindness and encouragement which have enabled me to persevere in an undertaking that would have been otherwise so hazardous and painful.

H. F. R.

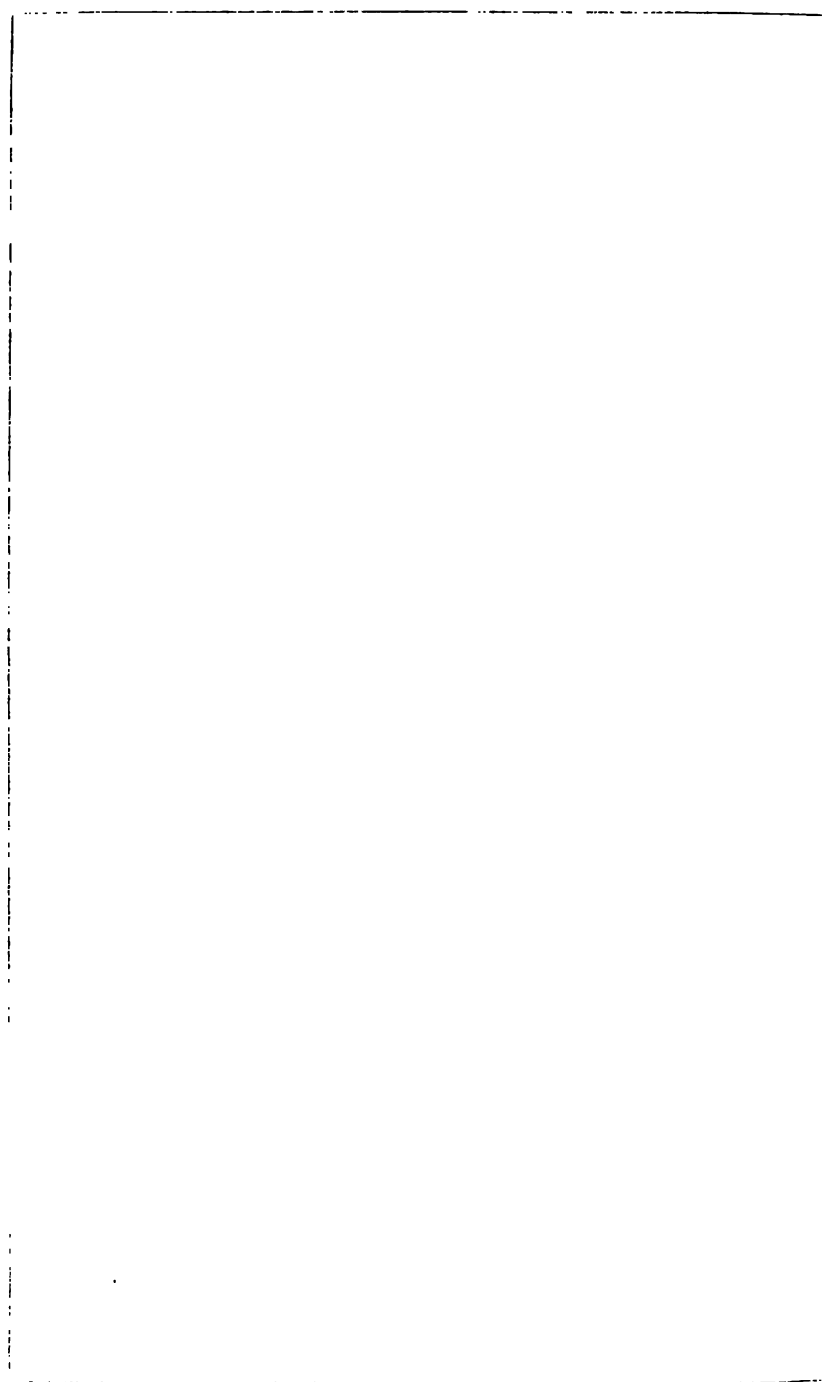
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M E D E A .

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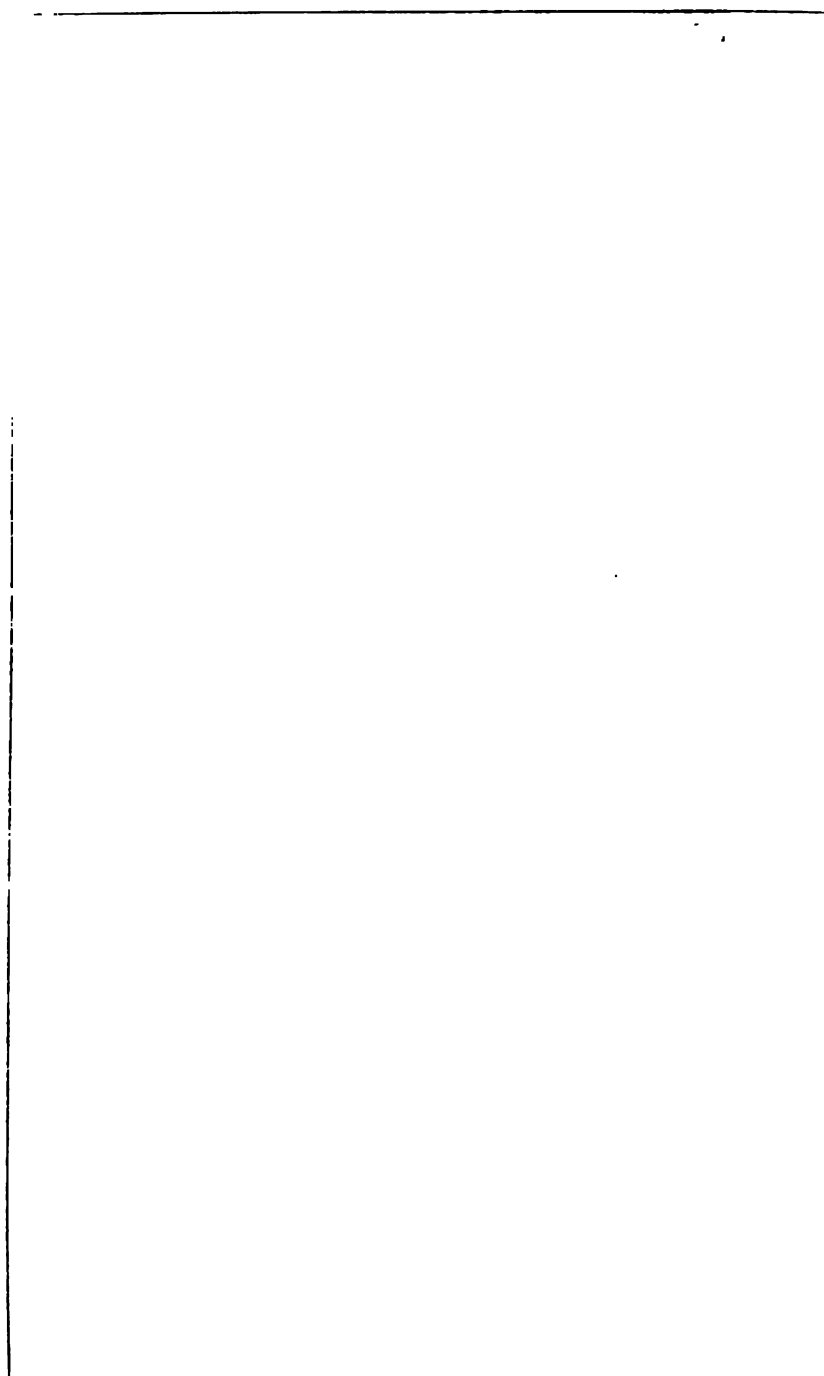


DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ÆTES,	<i>King of Colchis.</i>
ABSYRTUS,	<i>His Son.</i>
JASON,	<i>A Greek Prince.</i>
ICARUS,	<i>His Friend.</i>
CREON,	<i>King of Corinth.</i>
LYCUS,	<i>A Slave.</i>
MEDEA,	<i>Daughter of Ætes.</i>
CREUSA,	<i>Daughter of Creon.</i>
IANTHE,	<i>Attendant on Medea.</i>
DIRCETIS,	<i>Attendant on Creusa.</i>

Followers of Ætes, Creon, and Jason.

*The SCENE during the first two acts is in Colchis ; for the remainder
of the play, in Corinth.*



M E D E A .

ACT I.

SCENE I. *An apartment in the palace of Ætes. Enter ABSYRTUS
and IANTHE, meeting.*

IANTHE.

STAY, gentle prince, thy steps ; thy sister sleeps.

ABSYRTUS.

The king requires her presence.

IANTHE.

Even for him

I may not chase her slumbers, for to-day
A most unwonted gloom oppresses her,
And e'en to me, of her attendant train
Most favored, her accustomed sweetness fails.

ABSYRTUS.

Bid her come forth, and view the glorious scene
Which late I left. 'T would make a bondman's heart
Beat free from gloom. When shall I be a man ?

IANTHE.

What is 't inspires thy boyish fancy thus ?

ABSYRTUS.

Seest thou, Ianthe, by the river's side
Yon gallant ship ? Full fifty warriors thence —

The pride of Greece — have landed on our shores.
Radiant in armour, with heroic mien
They met the herald whom my father sent
To learn their purpose here. O fair Ianthe,
Hadst thou but seen their chief, Thessalian Jason !
Hadst seen his towering form, his flashing eye,
Whilst, lightly leaning on his spear, he gazed
On all around, as he were king in Colchis !

IANTHE.

What seeks he here ?

ABSYRTUS.

He claims the golden fleece, —
The hallowed offering on the shrine of Mars, —
And thinks with fifty followers to enforce
This bold demand against the king, my father.
And yet, Ianthe, he is but a youth, —
Has scarce seen twenty summers. Fare thee well !
When I 'm a man, and bear the weight of armour,
I 'll not be less a hero than this Jason,
For I shall be a king, you know, Ianthe. [Exit.

IANTHE.

Greeks ! How my heart beats at the sound ! I too
Was born in Thessaly's loved vales, nor can
Forget what freedom was, though gratitude
To my sweet mistress, gentlest of her sex,
Forbids the captive's sigh. Could I but see
My countrymen ! Medea sleeps ; — I 'll dare
Desert my post, — just for a moment's glance. [Exit.

SCENE II.

MEDEA discovered sleeping. She starts from her couch.

MEDEA.

STAY thine unhallowed hand ! He shall not die !
Where am I ? What enthralls my senses thus ?
Ah, was 't a vision then, yon glorious form ?
Return, return, bright phantom ! — Thou art fled,
And with thee my deluded heart has sunk
To night and chaos. Let me ever dream !
To be deluded thus is of more worth
Than all earth's tame realities. It moves
Before me now in all the light of truth !
Here stood the king, — his brow inflamed with rage ;
His murderous falchion raised against a form,
Ye gods ! so like yourselves in majesty,
And sunlike beauty, that my untamed heart
Owned a supremacy ne'er felt before,
Now felt but to be mourned. It cannot be
A thing of falsehood. Falsehood could not show
In forms so vivid. O'er it still would hang
Some murky vapor to betray its birth.
Cease, my bewildered heart, these fond essays
'Gainst reason's voice ! Enamoured of a dream !
Tears of despair and shame o'erflow mine eyes.
Yet why despair ? for some benignant power
May, in its prescient wisdom, thus have sent

These shadowy ministers from Lethe's banks
As heralds of the future. — It is so ! —
The air is redolent of perfume, and
A strange, mysterious awe o'erpowers my soul !
Some God inspires my hopes ! Bright Queen of Heaven,
Assure my troubled heart ! Grant me some sign
That madness has not seized my wavering soul !

(A peal of thunder is heard.)

Auspicious omen ! Mighty Juno, thanks !

(Enter IANTHE.)

IANTHE.

Princess, —

MEDEA.

Who calls me thus from heaven to earth ?

IANTHE.

The king —

MEDEA.

What of the king, barbarian ? Speak !

IANTHE.

Commands thy presence at the council-seat.

MEDEA.

Why should I tremble thus ? It is his wont
To call me to his side ; why should I fear
Lest mortal eye should scan this fluttering heart,
And read the page traced by the hand of Heaven ?

[Aside. Exit.]

IANTHE.

Some heavy care, or grief, or fear, disturbs

Her gentle breast. This agitation 's strange,
And comes across her tender, graceful mien,
Like storm-clouds whirling o'er the crescent moon.

(Enter LYCUS.)

LYCUS.

How 's this, Ianthé ? Musing ? Leave dull thoughts
To those who, free of hand, are slaves in mind,
Fettered by Care, who hath enfranchised us.

IANTHE.

Of such I mused. Saw you the princess ?

LYCUS.

No.

My errand was to bid her haste her steps
To the king's presence.

IANTHE.

She is gone ; but with
Such strange disorder in her looks and words
As made me wonder.

LYCUS.

Call'st thou that a cause
Of wonder ? Ah, Ianthé ! 't is more strange
That reason ever guides the looks or speech
Of one who lives defying all her laws.

IANTHE.

What mean'st thou, Lycus ?

LYCUS.

No enigma, dear.
Nature nor reason formed your gentle sex

To deal in magic arts, — save those of Love, —
To brave the gods, by rending the dark veil
They place between us and their mysteries, —
To waste the nights, which Nature gave for rest,
In vigils passed in dark companionship
With fiends and ghosts, forced from their dire abode
In Pluto's realm, — to fright the very stars
From their accustomed spheres, by horrid rites
At Hecate's shrine, — what gain ye by such power ?
Raised above mortals, still beneath the gods ; —
The first both fear and shun the sorceress ;
The latter mock her meagre emulation
Of godlike power and wisdom. She gains not
The pride of heaven, — loses the bliss of earth.
My life upon 't, Medea never loved.

IANTHE.

She loves me well.

LYCUS.

The good gods bless her for 't !
But think'st thou she hath ever loved — as we love ?

IANTHE.

No ; for a heart like hers could only yield
To one of as rich worth.

LYCUS.

Then she can love ?

IANTHE.

Ay ; her young heart 's a mine of pure affection,
From which no common hand hath ever gained

A single gem ; he who wins aught wins all ;
But he must show his title to the prize
In spotless truth, heroic deeds, and love
Ardent, unwavering, as the sun's bright rays.
Apollo's self might covet such a bride.

LYCUS.

Thy praises, flowing from a grateful heart,
Grace thee as much as her. But hark thee, love,
What says she to my suit for thee ? 'T is long
Since Love hath bound our hearts ; is it not time
To offer sacrifice at Hymen's shrine ?

IANTHE.

What should she say, whose wishes ever tend
To others' happiness ? She bade me bear
Her full consent to thee, and earnest prayer
That all the gods may smile upon us. Come,
I 'll show thee gifts her kindness hath bestowed.

LYCUS.

May she be happy as she now makes us !

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

*A public place near the palace ; in the centre a throne. Enter ÆTES,
attended by nobles and guards.*

ÆTES.

WHY stay these strangers ? Are they warned the king
Waits their approach ?

NOBLE.

Dread sovereign, they appear.

ÆTES.

The princess, too. We ordered her attendance.
Why lingers she ?

(Enter MEDEA.)

MEDEA.

My father and my king !

(Enter, opposite, JASON and the ARGONAUTS. MEDEA sinks at the king's feet, as she perceives JASON.)

My dream ! my dream ! Protect me, wife of Jove !

ÆTES.

What folly 's this ? Tremblest thou at a word ?
Arise ; remember now thou art a princess.

MEDEA.

Alas, 't is now I know myself a slave ! *[Aside.]*

ÆTES.

Strangers, let him who calls himself your chief
Stand forth, and say by what design or chance
You press the shores of Colchis.

JASON.

I am he,

Whom my brave comrades, the good gods consenting,
Have placed as leader of our enterprise ;
Jason, the heir to fair Iolcos' throne,
Whence, in mine infancy, Pelias cast
My sire, its monarch. Most unwillingly
I offer, sovereign Ætes, to your ear

This dull recital of a stranger's wrongs ;
But dire Necessity thus orders it,
To whom even Jove submits.

ÆTES.

Proceed to say
What dire necessity conducts thee here.

JASON.

Soon as to manhood's strength ambition's hopes
Dared look for confirmation, I approached
The tyrant, who, enthroned amid my subjects,
Suspected not a rival, and in words
Where prudence wrestled with my lawful passion,
I claimed my birthright. The usurper shook
With guilty fears. Although around the throne
His armed warriors closed, and I, a youth,
With no defence save the invisible arms
Of the just gods, stood there within his power,
He dared not, even by sign, command my death,
But with evasive speech strove to content me.
These were his words, for which I crave your patience : —
“ Late to my slumbers came the frowning shade
Of Phryxus, my unhappy kinsman, who
Bade me remember that the golden fleece,
Celestial gift, remained to bless a land
Remote from Thessaly. The vision's will
Must not be disobeyed : but I am old, —
By nature's laws unfit for enterprise ;
Therefore go thou ; to Colchis speed thy way ;

Regain the golden fleece, and here I swear
By Jupiter, our common ancestor,
No act of mine shall bar thee from thy right,
But my own hand place on thy head the crown."
He ceased : I joyfully accept his bidding.
Through tedious ways, and weary toils, at length
Behold the destined land, and from its king
Request the precious relic, which the gods
Ordained the spur and recompense of valor.

ÆTES.

Insolent pirate ! Lightnings blast thy tongue,
And thunders drown thy evil-boding voice !
Though thou couldst beard a Greek upon his throne
And live, so shalt thou never do in Colchis !
Down to the infernal gods, whose lying dreams
Have sent thee here, as fitting sacrifice
To Phryxus' angry manes !

MEDÆA.

On thy life,
Forbear ! The gods with awful wrath pursue
The wretch whose sacrilegious hand is raised
Against a guest. Dare Ætes war with Jove ?

ÆTES.

Away ! his rashness doth insult the powers
Whose rights you vainly urge. The prize he seeks,
Bestowed on Phryxus by Apollo's grace,
Descends from him to me ; — a talisman
Which brings such priceless blessings to my country,

That he who asks that, next may ask my crown.

JASON.

'T is with Apollo's self you war, O king !
The Delphian oracle declares the fleece
Destined to crown my toils ; no right hast thou
To the celestial gift, from Phryxus won
By guilt inhospitable.

ÆTES.

Seize him, guards !
Him and his robber crew ! — What do ye dread ?

MEDEA.

Medea's glance ! What Colchian dare assail
Where she defends ? By all the gods, who stirs
To thwart my will shall meet with pangs more dire
Than ever racked Prometheus' rock-bound frame !

ÆTES.

How 's this ? The earth-contemning ministrant
At Hecate's shrine thus mindful of a mortal !
Weigh'st thou a stranger 'gainst thy native land ?
Weigh'st thou a stranger 'gainst thy father's honor ?

MEDEA.

Country nor friends I weigh against the gods.
Say, when the supreme majesty of heaven
Deigns interfere to save a mortal's life,
Shall I refuse its task ? A vision, sent
By sovereign Juno, shaped my present course,
To save thy hand from blood which she protects.

ÆTES.

I yield, Medea. To such power as thine
Even kings are subject. I may thank the gods,
Who made thee gentle, when they made thee strong.
Jason, the princess' mercy claims thy knee.
But for her boldness, thou and all thy train
Ere this had fallen beneath my lawful wrath.

JASON.

To her, as to the guardian queen of heaven,
With grateful heart I thus present my homage.

MEDEA.

Warrior, pay reverence to the king of Colchis,
Not to his child and subject.

ÆTES.

Jason, hear !

This grace the king accords thee : thou art free,
Since Heaven regards thy life, to leave my court ;
But if thy desperate valor prompt thee still
Towards thine unattainable desire,
Learn through what toils and dangers you must seek
The temple of great Mars, upon whose shrine
Reposes the rich prize. First must be yoked
Two bulls, dreadful with horns and feet of brass,
Breathing forth poisonous flames ; with these thy hand
Must plough a space of earth ; a dragon's teeth
Then in the furrows sow ; they spring forth men !
With spear and shield they hotly seek the fight.

These slain, next quell the huge and watchful dragon,
Whose hideous length lies coiled before the altar.
But, ere with sacrilegious hand you seize
The glittering spoil, forget not first with prayer
To deprecate the vengeance of the god.

JASON.

I will implore his aid, nor doubt the boon.
A warrior is the votary of Mars,
Whose shield is ever spread to guard his life,
Whose smile beams through the darkest clouds of war,
At once the beacon and the lure to glory.

ÆTES.

Go, then ; prepare thy arms, and look thy last
Upon the orb of day ; for he and thou
Will sink in night together.

JASON.

I accept
The omen, king ; he sinks, to rise again
In splendor, warmth, and strength renewed. Hope not
To see me yield, but as he yields, to rise,
Exulting in new vigor. By the gods !
The conqueror's pride swells now within my breast.

[Exit, with his train.]

ÆTES.

Go, boastful youth, short-lived thy conquering pride !
Nor men nor gods shall force me to behold
A boyish Greek insult my rank and power,
Challenge my claims, and bear my spoils away !

(To MEDEA.)

Since mortal hand must not attack this foe,
See that the aids of magic fail me not.

[Exit, with followers.]

MEDEA.

Teach me, O Love, to save, or perish with him !

[Exit.]

SCENE IV.

Before the temple of HECATE. Enter JASON and ICARUS.

JASON.

No more, Icarus ; on this enterprise
I perilled all, and all is lost. To hope
Were weakness. For myself I have no fear,
But my brave friends thus ruined by my madness !
Would I had fifty lives, that, one by one,
I might resign them as my comrades' ransom !

ICARUS.

Hope dwells with life, nor will she be repelled
By wisdom or despair. To-day thy life
Seemed forfeit, but kind Heaven sent aid, — such aid
As well might make grim Death forego his purpose,
And give life double sweetness.

JASON.

It is that
Gives death its horrors. Love, Icarus, love
Attacked me from her eye, as now it gleamed

Defiance on my foes, now fell on me
 With soul-subduing sweetness, while a tint,
 Soft as the morn's first blush, suffused her cheek
 Beneath my grateful gaze. Ye gods ! to die,
 When Love's elysium first bursts on the soul !
 Better a thousand deaths in the heart's torpor,
 Than one at such awakening !

ICARUS.

E'en that one
 Thou shalt not suffer. She who saved thee then
 Can save thee now, and all with thee. Seek her ;
 With equal fervor breathe thy love to her,
 As now to me, nor fear for the result.
 Go, match fair Venus' mischief-making boy
 At his own weapons. Would thine were my lot !

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE V.

The temple of HECATE. Enter MEDEA.

MEDEA.

HAIL to this hallowed dome ! Here can I breathe
 In freedom ; here, in secret, meditate
 On saving him I love ; — I love ! — my lips
 Tremble in uttering such unwonted sounds.
 I love ! — Love whom ? — A stranger, who insults
 My father's power and seeks my country's wealth ?
 A wandering exile ? Princess, let thy heart

Beat with far other, higher aspirations ! —
Love ! What know I of love ? Vain dream, away !
'T is but my fancy's momentary freak,
For oft she aims at us Love's headless darts,
Which startle us, but wound not. 'T is not love !
My reason soars again ! — But must he die ?
Shall savage bulls, in most unequal strife,
With brazen horns tear out his warrior heart,
And crush that brow where dignity and grace
Are stamped as on the young Apollo's front ?
Must I behold the eyes, so full of hope,
Rolling in the fierce agonies of death ?
Ah, men and gods forbid the unholy strife !
Forbid it, Love ! I writhe beneath thy darts,
And nature rends away the filmy veil
With which I vainly sought to blind her eyes.

(Enter JASON.)

What wouldst thou here ?

JASON.

To thank thee for my life.

MEDEA.

A princess takes not e'en the hire of thanks
For princely deeds ; rather address the gods
To guard thee 'gainst the coming dangers.

JASON.

Ah !

Who looks from present bliss to future ill ?

MEDEA.

The truly great ! Else are they but the tools
Of time and chance. Aim'st thou to be of those,
Look to the future. Pray Minerva's aid,
Ere you seek that of Mars ; nor think that I
Can give thee wisdom, as I gave thee life.

JASON.

I do implore both deities, and draw
Their inspiration from thine eyes. They are
But two. Dared I but hope thou wouldst admit
Bright Venus to the council, that her smile
Might lend its softness to Minerva's lip,
And gild the rugged front of Mars, then, then,
With earnest prayer I 'd hail the heavenly three,
And raise an altar to propitious Fortune.

MEDEA.

What hath the gentle mother of the Loves
To do where Death hath warrant to intrude ?

JASON.

To soften the grim tyrant with her tears,
And charm him by her smiles ; to turn aside,
With heavy sighings of her fragrant breath,
His cruel dart ; then raise to life and hope
The rescued suppliant.

MEDEA.

I must hear no more !

JASON.

Stay, princess, I implore thee ! To what end

Didst thou avert thy father's falchion, since
A deadlier peril doth encompass me ?
Let me not dare to think you saved my life
To offer me, in ruthless sacrifice,
To foes beyond the prowess of a mortal !

MEDEA.

Ye heavens, bear witness that it was not so !

JASON.

Didst thou bend on me thy resistless glance,
Teaching my heart the most enthralling charm
That earth can boast, — bestowing thus on life
A new attraction, — but to give Death a horror,
Which his own grim aspect could ne'er impart ?

MEDEA.

Why dost thou torture me with these wild words ?

JASON.

Great Mars attest, that but a short hour since
I would have spurned the prophet to my feet,
Who had foretold that Jason would have shrunk
From danger, or from death ; now is my heart
Humbled by Venus' power, and I will sue
To thee for life, — if with that life thou 'lt give
Thy love ——

MEDEA.

Rash stranger, this is madness ! — Yet
I am most mad, who listen, but should fly !

JASON.

Thou canst not fly, for Pity bars the way.

O, let her plead for me, and Love for both !

MEDEA.

And if they should, Nature would plead against them.
My father, country, friends, her hand presents, —
An awful shield 'gainst the darts of Love !

JASON.

'T is true ; and I depart to die ; for see !
Thy fierce barbarians hurry to the spot
From which my dying groans must glut their ears ;
And with slow pace my brother-warriors go
To meet their doom in mine. Distracting thought !
Ah, mighty princess, hear my prayer for them,
My much-loved friends ! Save them, — thou only canst, —
For they have wives, and fair affianced brides,
In their own land of Greece !

MEDEA.

And for thyself ?

JASON.

I have nor wife, nor bride. I would not take
Life as a boon, though kings stooped to implore me,
Unless Medea's love enriched the gift.
Though life with her were an Elysium,
Without her smile it seems so dark and drear,
I cast it off, as captives do their chains,
And look for joy in death.

MEDEA.

Then, Jason, live !

Medea bids thee live for her — and Love.

JASON.

Does Fate relent ? I thank the bounteous gods,
Who, while I blamed their rigor, had in store
A blessing worthy an immortal's envy.
Bright star of hope, O, speak ! confirm again
My raptures ! Hark ! upon yon plain of death
They clamor for the victim. I must hence.

MEDEA.

Go, Jason, fearless, to the monstrous combat ;
It hath no dangers to Medea's lord.

[Exeunt severally.]

ACT II.

SCENE I. *Enter LYCUS and IANTHE, meeting.*

IANTHE.

THY looks bespeak great news ; what of the fight ?

LYCUS.

Joy, joy, Ianthe, chokes my utterance.

Jason hath burst the snares of magic power,

And stands triumphant 'mid the wondering crowd.

IANTHE.

O, stop not there ! Say, how was this achieved ?

LYCUS.

The gods have aided, for no earthly skill

Could thus have quelled unearthly enemies.

Low bowed the savage bulls their mighty necks,

And from the warrior's hand the slavish yoke

Received with fear, and then, with sullen steps,

But unresisting, dragged the servile plough

Across the appointed space ; with hasty hand

Jason dispersed upon the furrowed soil

The dragon's teeth ; forth sprung the wondrous birth

Of warriors, panting for the fight ; they joined

In strife unequal ; every side they press

The hapless Greek with blows ; still he maintains

Such conflict as a single arm can hold.
His falchion snaps in twain ; he sinks, he dies !
No, he but bends to snatch from favoring earth
Another weapon, in a ponderous stone.
With well-directed aim, and vigorous arm,
He hurls it 'midst his thronging enemies ;
When, wondrous to behold ! the war is changed !
Each dragon-sprung combatant turns his force
Against his brother ; bloody strife they wage,
Until not one is left ; and Jason stands
The conqueror, where he thought to find his doom !

IANTHE.

How bore the king this unexpected end ?

LYCUS.

Shame and revenge sat darkling on his brow ;
Then, starting from his seat, he waved his hand,
And, followed by his court, rushed from the scene.
Freed from the terrors of his glance, the crowd,
Both Greeks and Colchians, raise the loud acclaim.
Let me too shout, Jason and liberty !

IANTHE.

Mock not our fates with that forbidden word.

LYCUS.

By all the gods, it shall not long be so !

(Enter MEDEA in the background.)

What wouldst thou risk for Greece and liberty ?

IANTHE.

My life ! my life ! and only ask to breathe

Its latest sigh upon my native shores.

LYCUS.

It shall be so. Hold thou a constant mind,
And we 'll elope with these our countrymen.
'T will not be hard, so trusted as we are,
To effect this purpose. Look'st thou doubtingly ?
Canst thou refuse ?

IANTHE.

No, but there 's one, of whom
I dare not ask approval of my flight.

LYCUS.

Medea ?

IANTHE.

Gratitude.

MEDEA (*coming forward*).

Both bid thee fly !

Blush not, nor kneel for pardon, but receive
My full and free consent. Lycus, go thou ;
Swiftly and secretly prepare to leave
Colchis and slavery this night. Stay not
For further question. Thou art free. Begone !

[*Exit* LYCUS.]

My gentle girl, why look'st thou fearfully ?
Think'st thou my reason hath deserted me ?
But, though it still abide within my brain,
It hath no power upon the jarring thoughts
That rage in unrestrained rebellion there.
Ianthe, thou art but in name a slave ;

For in my heart I placed thee as a friend.
Hast thou not felt it so ?

IANTHE.

I have, my princess.
O, teach me to repay the debt !

MEDEA.

Then be
More than a friend ; O, be my elder sister !
For much I need a sister's aid and counsel.

IANTHE.

The first I render as a sacred due ;
But for the last, who to Medea can
So well give counsel as Medea's self.

MEDEA.

Not when my reason and my heart each strive
To gain the mastery. Yet to thy breast
I 'll dare intrust my thoughts ; I 'll dare to speak,
If thou hast strength to hear.

IANTHE.

Thy looks are strange !
If that which thou wouldst say refers to me,
Delay it not.

MEDEA.

Ianthe, thou hast seen
Lycus, thy chosen lord, depart in freedom :
Did it not glad thy heart ?

IANTHE.

Princess, it gave
New life to it.

MEDEA.

Didst thou not hope to share
This freedom with him ?

IANTHE.

How ! What means Medea ?

MEDEA.

If Fate decree that he alone shall view
His native Greece, and thou still linger here ——

IANTHE.

Fate first must slay me ! Princess, on my knee
I pray revoke the cruel supposition !
Thou art our Fate, thou only canst decree this.

MEDEA.

Could nothing tempt thee to remain in Colchis, —
Medea's friendship, wealth and rank, a lord
From the most noble of our Colchian warriors ?

IANTHE.

Were the world offered me I should despise it.

MEDEA.

Suppose thou wert in Greece, in thine own land, —
Dearer, because thine own, than fair Elysium, —
With all the ties of parents, sisters, brothers,
Kindred, and country strong within thy breast ;
Wouldst thou, for Lycus, rend those quivering bonds,
And trust thy bleeding heart with confidence
To him, — a stranger, from a distant land, —
And find thy home, thy kindred, — ay, thy life, —
In him ?

IANTHE.

Attest it, Truth !

MEDEA.

The oracle

Of nature doth address me through her lips !

Fear not, Ianthe, that I would destroy

The frailest tenure of thy happiness.

Draw nearer, lest the echo of my words

Should steal unto my tyrant father's ear.

As thou hast said, even so will I perform.

Hark thee ! 'T was I who tamed yon furious beasts !

'T was I who pointed out the magic stone,

Which turned upon each other the fell power

Of Jason's hellish foes ! Still there remains

Another task, — the watchful dragon's eye

To be eluded ; with Lethean dew

In magic slumber will I seal his senses ;

Seize then the golden fleece, and swiftly mount

The gallant Argo, blest in Jason's love,

And looking on the future through his eyes !

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

Before the temple of MARS. Enter JASON.

JASON.

HERE did my sweet enchantress bid me wait

The last hard task her tyrant sire ordained ; —

A task not hard to me, who, safely borne
On Cupid's pinions, o'er such perils skim.
What need he fear, whose path, however dark,
The gentle smile of Love's bright queen illumines,
While Mars, for her sake, with his warlike arm
Dashes aside the dangers of the way ?

(Enter MEDEA from the temple.)

MEDEA.

The foe hath sunk 'neath sleep's resistless wand.
Go fearlessly, and seize the prize : I cannot, —

[Exit JASON.]

I cannot gather strength thus to despoil
My father of the thing he holds so dear,
Although 't was won by blood, the innocent blood
Of Jason's murdered kinsman ! — Deities
Of heaven and hell, aid and protect me now !
At this drear hour of earthly stillness, ye
From Ida's groves, with ever-beaming eyes
That pay no tribute to Lethean waves,
Behold your votaress ! No visible form
Is near, but the cold, stern, unwavering glance
Of Destiny is fixed upon my soul,
Bidding me scan again its hopes, and fears,
And secret motives, in whose knowledge she
Must hold communion with me. 'T is the hand
Of Destiny impels, yet her stern voice
Sinks in my heart, and echoes through its cells, —
“ Reflect, Medea ! When you place yourself

On yonder wave, and view the Argo's sail
Spread to the breeze, you spread life's shivering sails
Before my breath, which, with a power beyond
E'en Hope, must bear thee onward to the end !
Before my piercing glance the phantom Change
Sinks to oblivion ; with Destiny
There is no change ! " — Yes, these the awful words

(*Re-enter JASON.*)

That thrill my frame, and make my purpose sick,
But cannot shake it !

JASON.

Bless thee for those words !
And thou shalt bless them through a happy life !
But see, our friends approach ; we must be gone !

MEDea.

A moment ! O my country, must I leave thee, —
Leave thee for ever ? Ah, I never knew
Till now how strong the love I bore to thee !
For the last time my swelling heart breathes forth
Its sighs of anguish on my country's airs !
My native earth, receive thy daughter's knee !
For the last time her falling tears bedew
Thy much-loved breast.

JASON (*urging her away*).

Medea !

MEDea.

Ah, my country !

(*Enter ABSYRTUS.*)

ABSYRTUS.

You pass not here !

MEDEA.

My brother ! We 're betrayed !

JASON.

Vain boy, give way, nor place thy stripling form
In opposition to a warrior's might !

MEDEA.

My brother, Jason !

ABSYRTUS.

Stripling as I am,
The bow I bear can send its messenger
Through manhood's heart ! One step, — it enters thine !

JASON.

Dost threaten me ?

MEDEA.

Stay, Jason, I implore !
Absyrtus, why art thou mine enemy ?

ABSYRTUS.

Am I my sister's enemy because
I am my father's friend ?

MEDEA.

Though thy rebuke
Hath show of justice, reason sees 't is void ;
And yet it brings renewal of a pang
Thou mightst have spared me, for too well thou know'st
My father never loved me.

ABSYRTUS.

Now so great
His love for thee, he comes to stay thy flight !

JASON.

Delay is death !

MEDEA.

Hold ! Brother, by our love,
Stand back ! Jason for my sake spares thy life,
At peril of his own. Yield, I beseech thee.

JASON.

Withhold me not, Medea ! Nay, fear not
For him or me ; I would not harm the boy
For Colchis' crown, and for his childish threats,
Rate them as breath.

MEDEA.

They come ! Brother, be wise !
Yield thou the path, lest desperation prompt
A deed whose blackness shall make Night recoil,
And wrap the land in deeper gloom than hers !

ABSYRTUS.

I tell thee, no ! he shall not pass alive !

JASON.

What, boy, thou 'lt prove a warrior ; but thy conquests
Must not begin with me !

(Wrests the bow from him.)

Ha ! torches moving !
Stay ! borne by friends or foes ?

ABSYRTUS (*attempting to stab him from behind*).

This from thy foe !

MEDEA (*interposing, plunges a knife into ABSYRTUS's breast ; he falls*).

Remorseless Furies ! What a deed is this !

(*Sinks into JASON's arms. Enter LYCUS and IANTHE on one side ;
on the other the ARGONAUTS.*)

ACT III.

Corinth. A lapse of ten years supposed from the date of Act II.

SCENE I. *The vestibule of the palace of CREON, king of Corinth.*

Enter LYCUS and DIRCETIS.

LYCUS.

GODS, can it be ? He woo another bride !

DIRCETIS.

Why dost thou doubt me ? Of Medea's wrongs
Wouldst thou be witness ? Thou shalt hear thy lord
Woo the king's daughter with persuasive tongue.

LYCUS.

Jove, dost thou see this treachery ? Hapless dame !
To punish Jason's enemies she sped
To far Iolcos, nor divined that foes
To her more dire remained at Corinth. She
Who ten long years shared Jason's wanderings
And soothed his cares ! O foul dissembler ! he
With fond embraces greeted her return,
And hailed the gods with thanks. How could she doubt
His constancy ! Yet, outcast from his love,
She must behold the claims of wife and mother
Crushed by a rival !

DIRCETIS.

Pity for her wrongs
Prompted my speech. I, too, am foreign here,
And know what pangs a stranger must endure,
Bereft of friends. But see where Jason comes.
Retire ; his words will soon attest my truth.

[*Exeunt.*]

(Enter JASON and ICARUS.)

ICARUS.

Is Jason, at this joyous season, sad ?
What gratitude from men may gods expect,
If he, on whom their choicest gifts they shower,
Repay their smiles with frowns ?

JASON.

Knows not my friend,
The gods bestow no good without alloy ?

ICARUS.

By Hymen, whom thy discontent insults,
I blame thy folly ! What hath Heaven withheld ?
When from usurping Pelias you fled,
Here did the gods appoint a safe retreat,
And Creon, Corinth's king, inspired by them,
Received the exile with a father's love.

JASON.

Have I denied the reverence of a son,
Or from the favoring powers the sacrifice
Due to their grace withheld ?

ICARUS.

New favors call

For present thanks ; thou who so late receivedst
The fair Creusa from her royal sire
Shouldst talk of no alloy in happiness.
A king's alliance, and a royal bride !
Yet who that saw thy brow o'ercast with gloom
Would think thou wert thus blest ?

JASON.

Cease, cease, my friend !

The gods bear witness that my gratitude
Keeps measure with their bounty ! Yet my heart
Forebodes, 'midst present blessings, future ill.
Though thou recall'st my promised royal bride,
Divorced Medea drives her from my thoughts ;
My fancy paints Creusa's beaming smile
Chased by Medea's frown, and, e'en amid
The hymeneal songs, her vengeful cries
Will seem to reach my ears.

ICARUS.

Does Jason's heart

Sink 'neath such fantasies ? What canst thou fear
From her, who for thy love resigned each tie
Of Nature's framing ?

JASON.

Nay, thou know'st her not !

As she resigned each native tie for love,
So will she rend each fibre which that love

Has twined around her heart, as sacrifice
Meet for the altar of Revenge, ere fail
To win the ruthless deity. But cease !
She comes whose ear such converse must not meet.

(Enter CREUSA.)

Welcome, bright queen of Jason's heart ! But say,
Why is thy cheek thus pale, and why do tears
Bedim the lustre of thine eyes ?

CREUSA.

Alas !

Divin'st thou not the cause ? She has returned
Whose rage I dread, whose name I scarce dare speak.

JASON.

Why doth Creusa fear ? Hath Jason's love
No power to chase such terrors ? Hath thy heart
More dread of her than confidence in me ?

CREUSA.

Jason, forgive my tears ! They flow for thee,
My father, and myself. Nor strength nor skill
Avail against Medea's arts. She comes,
With hands imbrued in Pelias' blood. 'Gainst me
How will her jealous wrath now burn ! Alas !
I blame her not ; for have I not won him,
To lose whose love were death to me ? Shouldst thou,
A few years hence, e'er turn from me as now
From her ——

JASON.

No, by the Queen of Heaven !

CREUSA.

The oath

Was once Medea's ; she believed, — as I do.

JASON.

My youthful fancy to Medea's charms
Fell captive, for in her I loved my life,
Which she alone could save ; a star of hope
She rose above the gloomy cave of death,
And marked with friendly beam the path of safety.
I saw, obeyed, and triumphed ; but my heart
No ruler knew, until Creusa's glance
Subdued its freedom.

CREUSA.

What revenge will seem

Too dire for this desertion ? What revenge
On me, my father, thee, perchance, — but no !
Thee she could never harm ! Hath she one spark
Of woman's nature 'neath a woman's breast,
Although her wrath could devastate the world,
Above the ponderous ruin Jason still
Would stand in safety. If she ever loved,
She could not hate thee.

JASON.

Let thy idle fears

For me and for thyself fade with that thought.

CREUSA.

Icarus, dost thou call my terrors idle ?

ICARUS.

Ay, lady ; think'st thou that a woman's arm
Can reach this palace, penetrate the shield
A father's and a lover's care presents,
To plant the avenging knife within thy heart ?

CREUSA.

You smile : 't is true ; I fear I know not what.
Adieu ; I 'll teach myself to think with ye.

JASON.

The gods protect thee, gentle one !

CREUSA.

And thee ! [Exit.

JASON.

A harder task remains, — Medea's wrath
To rouse, and to restrain ; — if that the last
Lie in the compass of a mortal's skill ;
If not, why, let her rage ! Creusa's charms,
The king's alliance, all combine to urge
My purposed nuptials. Creusa's love
Hath chased the gloom that gathered round my heart.
The future to the gods ! be mine the present !

[Exeunt.

SCENE II.

An apartment in the palace of JASON. MEDEA and IANTHE.

IANTHE.

PRINCESS, to-day ten circling years have fled
Since we left Colchis.

MEDEA.

Think'st thou I forget,
Because my tongue no telltale echo gives
Of my heart's converse ?

IANTHE.

I but thought how great
The changes Time hath made in ten years' flight.

MEDEA.

Ten vanished years ! — each year replete with bliss !
And Jason still is fond and faithful, still
Gazes upon me with a lover's eye,
Raves of my beauty with a lover's tongue ;
Still is as grateful for his wife's devotion,
As when from earthly foes and magic snares
Her power first rescued him. What hath that wife
To ask of earth or heaven, beyond the gift
Of such a husband, loving and beloved ?

IANTHE.

And dost thou spare, amid this happiness,
No recollection to thy native land ?

MEDEA.

Ah, many a tender thought flies back to thee,
My childhood's home, much loved, though rude ! Ten
years !
Why, I was but a child then, — Nature's child, —
With no delight beyond that mother's face,
Making her mysteries familiar things.
I thought I had scanned all ; but Jason came,

And his eye was my tutor in a page
Which till that hour I had passed idly by.

IANTHE.

How thou hast proved the beauty of that page,
A wondering world bears witness. Constancy,
Wisdom, devotion, all have but one aim,
Unfaltering tributaries to thy love !

MEDEA.

Love is my life ! and should I not give all
The treasures which the gods have granted me,
To feed its sacred and mysterious flame ?

IANTHE.

E'en if the flame should mount, with tyrant power,
And, 'mid her rites, consume the priestess ?

MEDEA.

Ay,

To keep the flame undying I would yield
My life rather than live to see it wane,
Expire, and leave my heart to dark despair !
Gods, e'er I know the agony to live
Unloved of him who sways my every thought,
O, snatch my life, and I will bless the stroke !

IANTHE.

Did I not know thy soul, I should exclaim,
A wife of yesterday might dream such dreams !

MEDEA.

A wife of yesterday ! — Hath Love with Time
Such close alliance, that old age to both

Comes with the same alloy of clouds, and cares,
And chill indifference to mortal joys ?
Ah, no ! Time is but for the form we wear ;
Love is the soul, which hath no bonds with Time.
For ever young, with wing untamed, he soars
On to the future, sorrow, care, and death
Made radiant by his smile.

IANTHE.

Such love as this
E'en Love himself knows not !

MEDEA.

So Jason read it in Medea's heart,
And feel it in his own, I care not, though
The god to Lethe's waves consign his shafts,
And leave the world to friendship's calmer reign.

(Enter JASON.)

JASON.

What, doth Medea ask for Friendship's reign ?

MEDEA.

Not while Love's flame survives in Jason's breast.

JASON.

If that expire ?

MEDEA.

Expire ! The gods forbid !

JASON.

Nay, start not at a jest !

MEDEA.

Will my lord jest

On such a theme ? As well mightst thou lay bare
This heart, thine altar, tear it from its place,
And cast it quivering from thy grasp to earth,
As jest thus of a tie to me so dear,
So sacred, that to sever it would be
To loose each human feeling from my breast,
To make me desperate, outcast from my kind,
Hating myself, the world, and thee !

JASON.

Even so ! *[Aside.*

Thou paint'st a Fury's, not a woman's, love !
But let not fancy torture thee ; the world
Hath real ills enough.

MEDEA.

But not for me !

I dread, — I know no ill when thou art by.
Exile and want, disgrace, the hate of men,
And wrath of gods, I could endure, nor waste
A care on them, so Jason lived and loved !

JASON.

The fiend Remorse is busy at my heart.
Can I again inspire such love, or lives
A woman, save Medea, in whose soul
A passion ardent, pure, as this can burn ?

[Aside.

MEDEA.

My lord, why on this day is thy brow sad ?

JASON.

Men oft have cares which women need not share.

MEDEA.

Hath Jason cares Medea cannot share ?
Ah ! strange and heavy should that sorrow be
Which clouds thy heart from mine.
Why speak'st thou not ? Since first our fates were joined,
Ne'er hast thou known a care or braved a toil
Which by my love has not been lighter made,
r vanquished by my skill.

JASON.

Medea, list !

Not grateful is it to a warrior's ear,
That even a wife should boast her benefits :
Remembrance is his part, and silence hers.

MEDEA.

Thou know'st that mine is not the ignoble soul
Which prompts a boaster's tongue. I boast of naught
Save of thy love, which made me what I am,
Thy equal partner, not thy household slave, —
As Grecian dames to Grecian lords must be, —
But worthy deemed by thee to aid thy councils,
To share thy wanderings, and assuage thy woes.
I boast my husband when I talk of these.
T'ell me, what care oppresses thee ?

JASON.

Not long

Wilt thou remain in ignorance.

MEDEA.

I felt

Thou couldst not long exclude me from thy heart.
Why does the darkness deepen on thy brow ?
Thou 'rt ill ! Thou canst not hide it from thy wife, —
From her, who, taught by love, reads in thy glance
Each shade of joy and pain. Surely thou 'rt ill !

JASON.

Not ill, Medea, not oppressed with cares
Beyond my own poor skill to overcome.
Content thee, thou mistak'st.

MEDEA.

I am content,
If for Medea's sake thou 'lt clear thy brow,
And greet this day with smiles.

JASON.

And why this day ?

MEDEA.

Is Jason's heart so changed, that he forgets
The day which once he hailed with fondest joy ?
If thou forgett'st, ah ! why should I remember
That on this day I fled my native shores, —
My father's court, where I was as a queen, —
• Left all for Love, and in his smile found all ?

JASON.

True ; and e'en then thou didst not look more fair,
Nor fell thy words more sweetly on my ear,
Than now, when lip and eye speak soft reproach !

MEDEA.

O, not reproach ! Thee I could ne'er reproach !

JASON.

Mayst thou think ever thus ! — I have essayed
A task beyond my power ; to others' lips
I must commit it. (*Aside.*) Fare thee well awhile.
The king requires my presence at the palace.

MEDEA.

Wilt thou not give this day to me ?

JASON.

The king
Is our protector, friend ; would it be well
To let his wishes pass unheeded ?

MEDEA.

Go ;
I would not counsel thee ingratitude.
But thou wilt see our sons ?

JASON.

It matters not ;
I shall return ere long. [*Exit.*

MEDEA.

Methinks I hear
Their voices. Go, Ianthe, bid them wait.

[*Exit IANTHE.*

“ It matters not ! ” Why do those careless words
Sink in my heart like the stern voice of some
Ill-boding oracle ? “ It matters not ! ”
Ah, could I think his heart dictated them !

[*Exit.*

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *The palace of JASON. MEDEA and IANTHE.*

MEDEA.

My husband loves another, and I hear it,
Yet cannot die, and cheat the avenging fiends
Who hurl this venom'd serpent at my breast !

IANTHE.

Nay, princess, yield thee not to such despair ;
Reject not hope so rashly.

MEDEA.

Cease, Ianthe !

Talk not of hope to me ! talk of despair,
Of madness, hate, revenge, of every fiend
The envious gods let loose upon mankind !

IANTHE.

Dear lady, call to mind past happiness.

MEDEA.

I have no memory save for misery.
Rememberest thou that night of bliss, — of woe, —
When from my native shores our vessel sped ?
Gods ! had mine been like other mortal hearts,
That night had seen its last convulsive throb !

Still doth imagination picture him,
My much-loved brother, writhing at my feet.
Ah ! why did Fate assign my hand a task
Which nature, reason, and my sex forbade ?
Ten years ! It cannot be ! — 't was yesterday !
If it were not, would he lie bleeding there,
A sister's weapon in the ghastly wound ?

IANTHE.

Dear lady, shake these horrid fancies off.

MEDEA.

Release me, let me seize the telltale steel !
My father must not know Medea's hand
Thus, with a Fury's grasp, hath dashed to earth
His fondest hopes ! — Ah ! whither has it fled ?
Ianthe, didst thou not behold ——

IANTHE.

Nothing,

Dear lady, nothing !

MEDEA.

Was it madness, then ?

Jove, leave me reason, though it only serve
T' enhance the ills you shower on me ! 'T is past !

IANTHE.

Thank Heaven ! O princess, calm this frenzied grief !

MEDEA.

Thou talk'st to me of calmness ! Hadst thou known
The wrongs that I sustain, — hadst thou e'er laid
Home, country, friends, thought, feeling, kindred blood,

Upon Love's altar with unfaltering hand,
And seen the gifts received but to be spurned,
Nor with thy clamor roused earth, heaven, and hell,
Then mightst thou argue thus, and I would hear ;
But now I could go mad, and rend the air
With maniac shrieks, and call aloud on Death
To end this woe, for Jason was my life.

IANTHE.

Calm thee, till he appear ; trust not the tale
From any lips save his. Thy agony,
The love which prompts it, and thy matchless charms,
Will chase this passing folly ; he will be
Again thine own.

MEDea.

Never ! by Juno's self !
The temple which Love reared within my heart
Was based on honor ; Jason has destroyed
The glorious pedestal ; prone to the earth
The baseless fabric, with its inmate, falls,
Nor leaves a vestige by which man can say,
Here dwelt the heart's great tyrant. With the fall
Earth shall resound, all hell start back aghast ;
For crushed and writhing 'neath the ponderous mass
My foes shall lie.

IANTHE.

Cease, dearest lady, cease
These vengeful threats ! Ere this, to Creon's ear
Some busy foe hath borne thy frenzied cries.

Rouse not his fears, lest with tyrannic hand
He crush thy sons, thyself.

MEDEA.

Let him essay !

IANTHE.

Nay, if not prudence, let thy pride restrain thee.
Grant not the triumph to thy foes to see
Medea, empress of her sex, o'erwhelmed
Beneath their treachery.

MEDEA.

Through all things else
I have been more than woman ! Can I now,
In outraged nature's agony, be less ?
The partial gods assign no blest abode
On Lethe's banks for woman ; yet she finds
In Love's protecting arms Elysium,
Nor asks a bliss beyond ; but cast from thence,
Say, whither shall she fly ? Despair in front,
On each side hatred and revenge ! above,
Dire madness hovers, and his hissing snakes
Cling to her brain, and goad her on to frenzy !

IANTHE.

Cease, lady ; steps approach ! — It is the king !
Frowns clothe his brow ——

MEDEA.

The king ! What would he here ?

(Enter CREON.)

Why do pride, pomp, and power approach the abode

Of desolation ? Say, what would the king
Of one so humble ?

CREON.

Doth Medea own
League with humility ? Thy scorn-wreathed lip,
Thine eye gleaming with hate, too well betray
The soul within, e'en had thy words been slow
To show thy treachery.

MEDEA.

Treachery, Creon !

CREON.

Ay.

Thy vengeful ravings, by a faithful tongue
Borne to my ear, are treachery to me,
Whose walls received, whose power protected, thee,
When suppliant thou sought'st what I bestowed,
A kingly hospitality.

MEDEA.

Jove, shall I hear

In silence taunts like these ? Do monarchs stoop
To barter hospitality ? If so,
May Heaven bear witness at how dear a rate
Thy kingly aid is prized ! Henceforth sink pride,
And perish generosity ! Let shame
And maiden modesty no more abide
In Corinth's walls, since Corinth's monarch holds
No memory of the first, and for the last, —

Let bards relate how Corinth's princess wooed
And won Medea's lord !

CREON.

Rail, haughty dame,
But bear thy clamors far from Corinth ; go,
Seek with thy sons a new abode. Hear'st thou ?
Thou art an exile.

MEDEA.

Creon !

CREON.

It is fixed.

MEDEA.

Lost ! lost ! (*Aside.*) Monarch, once more thy suppliant
Behold me ! How have I deserved this doom ?
What is my crime ?

CREON.

Thy threats of vengeance 'gainst
My daughter and myself. Thy former acts
Attest thee bold and resolute ; both swift
To plan, and prompt to execute, the deeds
Thy rage inspired. There is no change
In thy proud spirit ; thou hast sworn to wreak
Ruin on me and on my house. Fly hence !
Thy life is in my power ; I but command
Thy absence.

MEDEA.

Doth the king of Corinth fear
A woman ? Compassed by rank, power, and wealth,

Had I the will, where should I find the means
To pass those mighty barriers ? With no friends
To raise the cry of vengeance for my sake,
No warriors at my call, nor wealth have I
To purchase them, how could I injure thee ?
My sole reliance this weak woman's hand, —
This hand, which, fatal only to myself,
Each native tie hath severed ! Alien
From my own land, and exiled now from thine,
Alone I stand. Fear not, but pity me !
Poor, friendless, broken-hearted, desolate !

CREON.

1 Lady, the strength which lies in manhood's arm
Hath never caused me fear ; how then should thine ?
Thy dangerous wisdom, superhuman arts,
I dread, and will avoid.

MEDEA.

Unhappy me !

Let not my frantic ravings steel thy heart
Against my woes ! Have I not cause for frenzy ?
If in my agony my tongue o'erleaped
The bounds of wisdom, canst thou not forgive
A maniac's unmeaning rashness ?

CREON.

Rise,

Nor hope to shake me ; it is wisdom's part
To strangle danger in its birth, nor, led
By ill-placed confidence or timeless pity,

Delay until it rise in giant strength,
Defy our grasp, and hurl us to destruction.

MEDEA.

As thou hast said, I am within thy power ;
But yet, my lord, reflect how it may stand
With thine own honor to deprive me thus,
In wanton cruelty, of the sole good
Fate leaves me, — shelter for myself and sons.
I cannot need it long ; grant but a day,
One day, to think which way my steps should turn !

CREON.

Ask not an hour ; I will not give it thee.

MEDEA.

I do not ask thy pity for myself ;
I need it not. What matters it to me,
That the gods pour the tempests of the air
Upon my head ? Commotion wilder far
Must ever rage within. Think not I care
Or when or where I drain the cup of life
So early poisoned ; better at once to do 't,
Than drag a miserable chain of years
In hopeless agonies ! But for my sons,
Have pity on them, they are fatherless !
Turn not away, for thou hast children ; thou
Hast seen thy babes cling to a mother's breast ;
Hast seen that mother's eyes bedewed with tears,
Born from excess of rapture ! Paint to thyself
That mother and those sons by strangers' hands

Torn rudely from their home ; exposed, alas !
To the cold gaze of an unfeeling world ;
To woe and want, perchance to death ; — then steel
Thy heart against a mother's cries ! Thou canst not !
Creon, by all the gods, grant me this day !

CREON.

Thou hast prevailed ! Receive thy boon ; “ but mark,
That if to-morrow's dawn behold thee here ,
Thy sons, with thee, shall die ! ” * It is decreed.

MEDEA.

Dread monarch, thanks !

(*Exit CREON.*)

“ Rouse thee, Medea ! wake
Thy deepest science ! meditate, devise !
Call forth thy terrible power ! The contest now
Demands a daring spirit ! ” In the hour
Of their insulting triumph, let thy foes
Learn to distinguish 'twixt a dame of Greece,
Submissive to her tyrant lord's decrees,
And her from Phœbus sprung, the tameless Colchian,
Whose hand shall “ vindicate her glorious birth ” !

[*Exit.*

* The lines within quotation marks are from the *Medea* of Euripides.

SCENE II.

CREON's palace. *Enter JASON and CREUSA.*

JASON.

No more alarms, my fair ; thy prudent sire,
To rid thy breast of every fear, hath doomed
Her whom thou dread'st to exile ; she will turn
Her steps from Corinth's walls, nor evermore
With jealous ravings mar thy peace.

CREUSA.

And thou ? —

Will no regrets—— Nay, frown not ! Canst thou think
I doubt thy love ? I could not, though the world
Proclaimed thee suitor for my father's power,
And not his daughter's heart.

JASON.

And who has dared——

CREUSA.

Nay, nay ! 't was but a slave, a spoiled attendant,
Whose love for me prompted her jealous fears.
The king approaches.

(Enter CREON.)

Father, dost thou bring
Assurance of my peace and safety ? Ah ! —
You pause ! My father, say not 't is delayed !

CREON.

But for a day.

CREUSA.

Thy daughter's happiness
May hang upon that day.

CREON.

Thou tak'st it gravely ;
But let it not be said the daughter's heart
Was sterner than her sire's. Medea's tears,
Her supplications, swayed my too harsh purpose.
She prayed but for a day, a single day,
To frame some plan ; not for herself, but for
Her tender sons, with moving words, and looks
More moving, she besought my pity ; prayed
I would not, through my fears of her, cast them,
Thus unprovided, on a heartless world.

JASON.

My children ! No ! no power shall rend them from me. [*Aside.*
What more, my lord ?

CREON.

In very shame I yielded ;
But warned the dame, that on the morrow's dawn
She, with her sons, must leave this land or die.

JASON.

Creon, they are my sons ! They shall not go !
Let me behold in Corinth one so bold
As harm those innocents ! Am I not he
Who braved fierce Ætes and his savage horde
In search of fame ? Shall I not brave much more
For them ? Here they remain !

CREON.

It cannot be !

Jason, dispute it not ; the king commands.

JASON.

No king's command shall make them fatherless !

CREON.

That thine own act hath done ; and that thy sons
Should now remain in Corinth, — that within
My house they should be trained, who, grown to manhood,
Must prove its direst foes, — would show me mad
Beyond conception.

JASON.

Will they not be trained

By me, thy grateful friend, — thy son ?

CREON.

Ere this

They know their mother's rage and hate ; its cause.
Shouldst thou retain them here, they first receive
Her lessons of revenge, — bear them in mind,
Despite all other teaching, till the hour
Occasion marks for vengeance bids them rise
In hot rebellion for Medea's sake, —
Foment foul discord in my realm ; perchance
In ruin overwhelm my house !

JASON.

Yet they are mine.

CREON.

But wouldst thou rend them from their mother's arms ?

If she must fly, make her not desolate
Of all life's blessings. Leave her sons ; their smiles
Will calm her rage, their innocent caresses
Softens her harsh resolves ; to her heart's fever
They best can minister.

JASON.

Spoke she of me ?

CREON.

No.

JASON.

Didst thou deem her grief or rage most strong ?

CREON.

Sunk in despair she seemed, her every thought
Centred upon her sons, condemned, perchance,
To bitter want.

JASON.

That fear no more must rack her.

CREUSA.

No ; let the treasures of the royal house
Be showered upon Medea. Wealth will purchase
Home, country, friends. O, may she find them all
Far, far from Corinth ! Whither goes my lord ?

JASON.

My sons demand my care.

CREUSA.

Trust not thyself
In that fell woman's power ! A messenger
Can do thy will. Can she not murder thee ?

JASON.

Nay, nay, Creusa, check this folly.

CREUSA.

No !

Thou must not go ! I cannot suffer it !

Thy wife, thy bride, implores !

JASON.

My children's wants

With stronger voice command me. Nay, weep not.

Should I to menial hands intrust such charge,

Medea would repel my offered aid

As insult. Fare thee well. Surely no ill

Can reach thee in my absence ; and for me,

Trust thou my safety to Medea's love.

[Exit.

CREUSA.

A mournful bride am I, who see my lord

By such contending interests swayed. Alas,

My father ! by thy mercy shown to her

Thy daughter's heart is rent.

CREON.

Think not of it.

'T is but a day. How quickly will it pass !

[Exeunt.

SCENE III.

In the palace of JASON. Enter LYCUS and IANTHE, meeting.

LYCUS.

How fares the princess, dear Ianthé ? Say,
Is she now calm ?

IANTHE.

No ; bathed in tears, she yields
To grief more harrowing than her wildest rage.

LYCUS.

Alas ! who shall console her ? who withdraw
The poisoned arrow from her heart, and heal
The rankling wound ? Not Esculapius' self !
But lo ! my lord approaches.

IANTHE.

Ha ! what seeks
The traitor here ? Why, shameless, doth he come
T' inflict new torture, by his hateful presence,
Upon his writhing victim ?

LYCUS.

Peace ! She comes !

(Enter MEDEA.)

IANTHE.

Dear lady !

LYCUS.

Gracious princess !

MEDEA.

Faithful friends,
Your presence 'mid this scene of desolation
Brings back the phantom Hope, who else had fled
This desecrated fane, my heart. I gaze
On ye, and feel I am not yet alone.

LYCUS.

No, lady, we are still what we have been,
Thy friends, thy servants, slaves, — what thou wouldst
have us, —
To live or die for thee.

MEDEA.

My thanks, good Lycus,
All I can offer, thy fidelity
Commands. A step familiar to my ear
Approaches ; 't is my lord's ! What said I ? His
Who was my lord. O for a moment's respite !
(Motions LYCUS and IANTHE, who withdraw. Enter JASON.)
My husband ! *(He turns from her.)* It is past, and I am
marble ! *(Aside.)*
Com'st thou, a foe to Creon's lenity,
To haste my flight from Corinth, with my sons ?

JASON.

Unjust ! Not I, but thine unbridled passion
Hath caused thy exile. Thou, forsooth, must rave
Of vengeance 'gainst the monarch whose strong arm
So long hath shielded thee ; ingratitude
Can claim no pity. But for this, my voice

Had been attended, and thou still hadst found
A home in Corinth. Thy intemperate wrath
Has raised suspicion 'gainst thee. Thou must fly ;
Nor thou alone ; but, for their mother's folly,
My sons must suffer. They must range with thee,
Homeless and friendless.

MEDEA.

It is well ! Rail on !
Declare the wrongs I 've done thee ! Name each fault
For which I owe atonement ! I, in meekness,
As doth become a Grecian wife, will listen.

JASON.

This only will I say ; had thy rash tongue
Yielded to reason's dictates, still my sons
Had known a father's care, still hadst thou dwelt
In peace and safety.

MEDEA.

No ! Think'st thou my soul
Is humbled by thy insults to endure
That the same land should hold thy new-chosen bride
And me, the outcast from thy love ? O, never !
Far rather would I dwell in endless night,
The earth my couch, the heavens my canopy,
The thunder-peal my music, the red flash
Of angry Jove my torch, and savage beasts
My sole companions !

JASON.

Yet I would not wish

With thy barbaric tastes my sons infected.
Here should they still have dwelt, here grown to man-
hood,
Sharing through my alliance with the king
Each good that royalty bestows. By thee
They suffer ; thy insensate ravings roused
Wrath and suspicion in the king : — “ The sons
Of such a mother must prove dangerous ” ——

MEDEA (*interrupting*).

The king is wise ! most wise !

JASON.

“ We do not spare,
In pity for their youth, the tigress’ whelps.”
Such answer made he to my prayer.

MEDEA.

Thy prayer !
Fervently urged, no doubt ! Nor would I wish
My sons by thy ingratitude infected ;
Their tender hearts, in the first bloom of youth,
Poisoned by contact with thy perjured self.
Better to dwell in poverty, with slaves
Share toil and want, nor dream of higher birthright,
Than to be trained the sycophants of courts,
’Neath the cold shadow of a step-dame’s frown !

JASON.

Nay, didst thou seek their good, not yielding thus
To blinding rage and jealousy, thy wish
Would be that Creon yet might grant their stay.

MEDEA.

With me they go ! But whither ? “ Ah, my country !
Now I remember thee,” — now toward thee
Despairing cast my eyes ; for dare I hope
A shelter in thy breast ? My father, too !
No smile of love on his stern lip would speak
A welcome to his child ! — False Greek ! for thee
Have I betrayed my sire ! — for thee I bathed
My hands in kindred blood ! — for thee I roam
An outcast from the land where wealth and power
Were slaves to me, — where I was as a queen !
For thee I stooped from my high sphere, for thee
Inured my woman’s frame, my woman’s heart,
To toil and dangers ! How am I requited ?
On my defenceless head are showered neglect,
Falsehood, disgrace, and insult !

JASON.

Who can stem
The torrent of a woman’s tongue ? Hadst thou
The common reason of thy sex, thou hadst weighed
With a more equal mind the good and evil,
Which, as to all mankind, the Fates dispense
To thee. I found thee in a savage land,
Where men, more savage than their native wilds,
Paid thee the blind obedience of fear ;
Where a barbarian king, thy sire and tyrant,
Ruled, as the lion rules his fellow-beasts.
From that barbaric race, that land remote,

To Greece, the chosen seat of gods, I bore thee ;
 In that wild region hadst thou languished else,
 Obscure. Fame never stooped her pinion there ;
 But here thy name, thy wisdom, mighty deeds,
 Wide o'er the land resound ; sages commend,
 And warriors hear with wonder. Thus, by me,
 Renown, far dearer to thy heart than love,
 Has crowned thy wish ——

MEDEA.

Ungrateful as thou art,
 And shameless ! Fame, renown ! — talk'st thou of these
 To me, who, for thy sake have sacrificed,
 Save life and reason, all ? I thank the gods,
 They leave me these for vengeance !

JASON.

This it is
 Brings exile, with its evil, on thyself
 And sons. Yet poverty, midst other griefs,
 They must not know. Lady, at thy command
 Are all my treasures ; freely take such store
 As may seem needful.

MEDEA.

Deem'st thou me so fallen
 As to receive thy gold ? — gold from the hand
 That spurns me ? Never ! Let me first endure
 The sharpest pang which nature's wants inflict,
 And starve ignobly, ere accept thy bounty !

(Enter IANTHE with the two children.)

IANTHE.

O, let their smiles end this unnatural strife !

JASON.

My sons ! Thou wouldst not let them want ?

MEDEA.

With me

They suffer what the gods inflict. Farewell.

JASON.

Woman, thy rashness tempts the gods. Art thou
A mother, and thus reckless of their welfare,
Whom thou shouldst prize above all other blessings ?
Think not I will abandon them ; the king
Shall grant my prayer !

MEDEA.

And what will that avail thee ?

JASON.

Much ; here shall they remain. Can I intrust
My sons to one so desperate ? No ! I'll snatch
From thy unnatural arms their tender frames.

MEDEA.

Sport with the thunder, and defy the lightning, —
They may be merciful ; — but tempt no more
Medea's wrath !

(Exeunt MEDEA, IANTHE, and children.)

JASON.

Infuriate as thou art,
Place not the sufferings which thy stubborn spirit
Now dooms thee to endure to Jason's charge ! [Exit.]

SCENE IV.

In the palace of CREON. Enter CREON and CREUSA.

CREUSA.

Not yet returned ! Not yet ! Alas ! strange fears
Thicken around my heart ; unbidden tears
Gush from my eyes. Avert the omen, gods !

CREON.

Why thus afflict thyself ? This day, to which
Thy terrors cling, sinks 'neath the western wave.

CREUSA.

Slowly to my impatient eye it sinks.
Fate hangs on Phœbus' chariot-wheels, and stays
His fiery-footed coursers.

CREON.


And with Fate

Nor prayers nor tears avail. Go then, my daughter,
Array thee for the banquet, and await
Thy lord's return in patience.

CREUSA.

Patience, father !

Patience befits a slave. It is allied
To dull indifference. They, who never knew
The smile of happiness, could never feel
The pangs which I endure, whose aching heart
Fears lest each moment, as it onward flies



On its swift wings, should bear some gloomy cloud
To veil that smile for ever. Even now
Jason may writhe beneath some horrid spell
Or fatal poison ! Who shall rescue him ?
Is not that dire enchantress versed in charms
To shorten life ? What human power can bid
Defiance to her skill ? — Why lingers he ?
Doth she still love him ? Then, perchance, her wiles,
Her tears, her glowing beauty, have ensnared
Again his heart ; perchance e'en now he vows
Fidelity anew, and flies with her
From Corinth and Creusa, self-exiled !
O falsehood worse than death !

CREON.

Have I not said,
What Fate decrees no mortal can escape ?
Banish thy fears. To be a warrior's bride,
To train a warrior's sons, befits not her
Whose heart falls captive to each fancied ill,
And shrinks in coward weakness from the glance
Of dark Misfortune, whom the gods ordain
The monitor of mortals. Go ; let hope
Drive from thy breast despondency.

(*Exit CREUSA.*)

Her fears,
Despite my reason, sink into my heart.
Medea's prayer I granted ; shame forbade
That I — a man, a monarch — should refuse

A boon so slight ; such sternness had appeared
A wanton cruelty. Could I confess
My fears enforced me to 't ? Day vanishes,
Yet Jason lingers. May the gods protect him ! [Exit.

SCENE V.

Palace of JASON. LYCUS and IANTHE.

LYCUS.

I THANK the gods, Medea smiles again !

IANTHE.

So do not I. Trust me, there 's danger in 't.

LYCUS.

Nay, but she spoke of reconciliation.

IANTHE.

Strange ! can her brain —— But no, she 'll be herself
Though all the world with Corinth league against her.
Do thou her bidding, be thy life the forfeit.

LYCUS.

In that I am her slave. She comes.

(Enter MEDEA.)

Dear lady,

The gods give comfort to thy heart !

MEDEA.

They do,

Good Lycus. Peace begins to fold again

Her white wings o'er my breast. I pray thee bear

Such message to my lord ; say, 't is my prayer
He will return to take my last farewell,
And grant my pardon for the late offences
Of an unbridled tongue ; and for my sons
I would entreat his care ; bid him forget
Their mother's folly, and, for their dear sakes,
Attend me here. Haste, for time wanes apace.

(Exit LYCUS.)

IANTHE.

Ay, lady, few and short the hours of safety
Allotted us in Corinth.

MEDEA.

Us, Ianthe !

IANTHE.

Us, lady. Nay, look not so sadly on me.
My husband and myself, by thee enfranchised,
Are still the slaves of gratitude ; with thee
In cities or in deserts we abide ;
With thee we share whate'er the Fates decree, —
Danger, or toil, or death. If to the first
Thou 'rt doomed, why is the arm of Lycus strong,
If not to ward it from thee ? If to toil,
Our hands and hearts shall meet it ; if to death,
Alone thou shalt not tread that gloomy path ;
We follow through its shades ——

MEDEA.

This, this is friendship !

To suffer such a sacrifice would prove

Me base as thou art pure ! Ah, no, Ianthé !
The path which I have chosen too rugged, steep,
Too full of dangers, is for mortal foot,
Save mine, to press ; no friend may share it with me.
Didst thou but dream its horrors, thou wouldst start
From sleep as from an enemy, and dread
To gaze around thee, lest thy sight be blasted
By fiends and furies poured from Tartarus,
T' inspire the monstrous vision.

IANTHE.

No, Medea ;

Earth cannot show the danger whose stern front
Would awe me from thy side ; my heart might quail,
'T is true, but not my faith. Then, dearest lady,
Let me still follow thee !

MEDea.

Think not of it !

E'en I, who never knew dismay, could shrink
From the dire view, and supplicate the gods
To shroud it in its native gloom ! But no !
Each moment, in distinctness more appalling,
It grows before me, till its gorgon shapes
Transform my heart to marble !

IANTHE.

Ah, my princess !

Thy words are gloomy, but the fire of vengeance
Gleams from thine eyes, betraying to my view
The thought which fills thy soul ; thou meditat'st

Revenge as mighty as thy wrongs !

MEDEA.

Forget

That I have spoken, that thou hast dared divine
My purposes ! Go, call my children hither.

IANTHE.

Thy children, lady ?

MEDEA.

Ay, my precious boys,
Whom I had hoped to see their father train
To serve the god of wars ! But mortal hope,
Mortal presumption, Heaven delights to check,
Lest the strong tide of earthly happiness
Sweep from our hearts remembrance of the gods
From whom our blessings flow. — Didst thou not hear
My will ?

IANTHE.

Thy pardon, lady, but I feared ——

MEDEA.

What dost thou fear ? What darest thou fear ? Ianthe,
I brook no scrutiny ! — Yet stay, thy love
Commands my confidence. Shall I go forth
To misery whilst from my shattered hopes
Another's bliss is springing, — another's heart
Securely triumphing in Jason's love, —
Another's charms receiving Jason's homage, —
Another's form in confidence reposing
On his protecting arm ? The thought is madness !

This new-made bride and her tyrannic sire
Deem me their victim ! — Let them dream so ! — soon
My hand shall chase the sweet delusion. Say,
Is it not right ?

IANTHE.

Else would thy foes and friends
Esteem thy vaunted courage, skill, and power
As vanished quite, or thy strong soul subdued
Beneath these wrongs.

MEDEA.

Such doubts shall ne'er be theirs.
A poison of such agonizing power
As that which racked Alcides' iron frame
I have prepared ; to the Corinthian bride
Gifts will I send with this imbued ; and when
These glittering snares adorn her form, fierce pangs
And sudden death ensue. Go now, Ianthe ;
By my sons' hands will I despatch the casket
Which holds my sure but unseen vengeance. Go.

IANTHE.

For thine own safety, — hast thou thought on that ?
Thy children, too, who shall preserve their lives ?
Their blood and thine must flow in expiation.

MEDEA.

“ Hath life a blessing ” left, that I should fear
The stroke that brings forgetfulness of ill ?
Yet, though I dread no death they could inflict,
Shall my foes boast that proud Medea's life

Was yielded to their power ? Never ! The gods
Inspire me with a higher hope, and point
A refuge far from hostile Corinth. Go !

(Exit IANTHE.)

Can she suspect ? Are my soul's agonies
So stamped upon my face, that those who gaze
Read the dire thoughts within ? Alas ! alas !
O'erburdened Nature doth avenge herself
By such betrayal of the wrongs she suffers.
Yet with self-torture must I buy revenge,
Or live, — the mockery of my foes. My skill
Hath for this royal bride framed pangs as dire
As hell itself can boast. He, whose false heart
First caused my woes, — shall he escape ? Great Themis,
With thy stern power inspire me ! He shall live
To stand, like me, 'midst desolation, — live,
Till the pure air seems burdened with a curse,
The curse of hopeless life.
O vengeance ! No mean sacrifice thy voice
Demands, yet to thy ensanguined shrine all, all
Thou canst require, I bring. — My sons ! my sons !

(Enter the children.)

SONS.

Dear mother !

MEDEA.

Gods ! have ye no mercy ? — none ?

SONS.

Do not weep, mother ! When our father comes

He 'll think we have grieved you, and will then be angry ;
 For he has said, if we would have him love us
 We must not give you pain ; and then he told us
 How you preserved his life from cruel men
 Who would have murdered him, had you not loved
 And taught him how to shun their snares.

MEDEA.

Cease ! cease !

FIRST SON.

O mother, do not look so strangely on us !
 When will my father come ? If you are troubled
 He will console you. Why does he go from us
 So oft, and stay so long ? 'T is almost night.

MEDEA.

Quite night ! — a night no sun shall e'er dispel.
 Poor boys ! you know not the funereal gloom
 Which o'erhangs ye, — frightful, endless night !

SECOND SON.

But when our father comes we shall not mind it ;
 For I have heard you say his smile could chase
 All darkness from your mind.

MEDEA.

My son, my son,
 Wouldst thou distract me ? Jason's smile ! Alas !
 No longer doth it beam for us. O traitor !
 Doth he deserve a son ? No. Let my hand,
 By justice armed, sweep from his sight each hope ! —
 Ah, wretched mother ! where are then thine own ?

Come to my heart, my sons, your only home !
O hapless babes ! ye smile in the embrace
Of misery, unconscious that the wretch
To whom you cling, the daughter, wife, and mother
Of princes, hath no shelter for your youth,
No bulwark for your safety, but these arms !
Yet can I cast ye thence ? Ah, no, my sons !
Though wretched, outcast from my husband's love,
There is a strange relenting in my heart
Which whispers, " live for these, and in their smiles
Find hope." I yield, and am again a mother !
Why, to wound Jason's peace, should I inflict
Upon myself a wound more deadly far ?
Far from these hostile walls we 'll fly. But how
Or whither ? How preserve my sons from want
And danger ? Should death seize me on the way,
Must they not perish ? Who, in all this land,
Would look with pity on Medea's sons ?
To fly with them is madness, — but to leave them
Here, 'mid my foes, despair ; for those who see
The royal house destroyed beneath my hands
In their hot wrath would crush these helpless ones.
No, by the gods ! Within their tender limbs
Courses the blood of princes ! 'T is not fit
That the rude touch of an ignoble foe
Pollute these scions of a race of kings !
Nor can my soul permit a hated Greek
To triumph o'er Medea's slaughtered sons.

“By me who gave them life death shall be given !”
Are the gods just, who make oblivion
The last, best gift a mother can bestow
Upon her sons ? No ! Ye who proudly sit
In cloudless glory on Olympus’ height,
Who revel in the pleasures and the crimes
Of man, your slave, yet on his frailties heap
Sorrow and suffering, I defy ye all !
Strong in despair I stand ! My children’s blood
Shall flow, — libation grateful to the fiends
Who goad my heart to frenzy ! Why not now ?
Why not at once escape the ills that close
Like waves around me ?

(Drawing a dagger from her dress.)

Steel, upon whose point
The lurid fires of vengeance seem to play,
And menace, as they gleam, my tardy hand,
No longer shalt thou thirst ! Thy magic touch
Shall free my sons and me ! To thy embrace
My full heart leaps ——

FIRST SON.

Mother, dear mother,
Give me that knife.

MEDEA.

What wouldst thou with it, boy ?

SON.

Keep until I am a warrior, then
Strike to the heart that cruel king of Corinth

Who spoke uncivil words to you this morning ! —
Give me the knife !

MEDEA.

Take it and live, — for vengeance ! —
Go, my beloved ones, hasten to Ianthe,
And bid her send me, by your hands, a casket,
Which on my couch she 'll find.

(*Exeunt SONS.*)

'T is Jason comes, —
His heavy tread the index of his heart.
Not such the step with which my lord once came !

(*Enter JASON.*)

JASON.

“ I come at thy request, for though ” thy rage
Burn against me, my aim is still to serve thee.
Whate'er thy wish, Medea, name it ; I
Stand eager to fulfil it.

MEDEA.

My first wish
Is thy forgiveness, Jason, for the passion,
Unjust, imprudent, which I nursed against thee.
'T is past ; calm reason hath resumed her reign
Within my mind, and I have schooled myself
To own the wisdom of thy new alliance.
“ O, be not thou like me perverse ! ” I own
The error of my judgment. We have loved.
O, by the memory of those days, when love
Was peace to us, though all the world breathed war,
Forgive my selfish rage !

JASON.

All is forgiven ;
Nor do I blame thee for the past ; — it is
A woman's part to watch o'er household ties,
And when by jealous fury warmed, forget
That love should yield to reason.

MEDea.

Treacherous Greek,
Where wert thou now had I remembered that ? [Aside.

JASON.

These better counsels show that Time hath led
Reason in triumph to her seat, and prove
Thee wise beyond thy sex.

MEDea.

And see, our sons !
Come forth, my dear ones, haste, embrace your father.
(Reënter the children. They place a casket in their mother's hand.)
“ Ah me ! the thought of some concealed ill
Comes o'er my heart. Will you, my sons, live long
To stretch your dear hands thus ? Unhappy me !
These eyes have lately learned to weep, this heart
To know what fear is.”

JASON.

Nay, subdue thy fears,
Nor doubt my cares for them. My noble boys,
The gods consenting, I shall yet behold
Ye great and glorious in the state of Corinth.
“ O, may I see you blooming in the pride

Of manhood, and to every virtue trained
Superior to my foes ! But why is this ?
Why stands the moist tear trembling in thine eye ?
Why is thy pale cheek turned aside, as if
Thine ear received my words unwillingly ? ”

MEDEA.

“ ’T is nothing ; I was thinking of my sons.”

JASON.

“ Be cheered ; their welfare is my dearest care.”

MEDEA.

“ I will be cheered, and trust thee ; yet I am
A woman, and by nature prone to tears.”

JASON.

“ Why o’er thy sons with such excess of grief ”
Dost thou now bend ?

MEDEA.

“ I am their mother ; when
Thy wish was breathed that they might live,” my heart
Throbb’d e’en to bursting, as the doubt arose
Whether the gods would grant a wretch like me
A boon so precious. Yet, my lord, of thee
The favor next in value to their lives
I would implore. In this Corinthian land
I may not dwell, and though the king’s command
Exiles my sons with me, let not his wrath,
Let not my folly, tempt thee to desert them.
O, let them live beneath thy care ! Not when
To manhood grown will they require thy aid,

Thy watchful eye, thy love, and thy protection,
But now. Entreat the king revoke his sentence.
Protect them still, and may the gods reward thee !

JASON.

I will entreat his favor.

MEDEA.

Nay, implore,
Command ! Denial hear not, understand not !
Look on their tender frames. O, leave them not
To know an exile's wants and woes ! They are
Thine own, thy once-loved sons ; thou wilt not, no,
Thou canst not, let them suffer !

JASON.

Are they not
Still loved, still prized, beyond all other wealth ?
Ah ! those confiding glances touch my heart
More deeply than the favor or the wrath
Of thousand kings could do. My warmest prayer
Shall urge their stay.

MEDEA.

First to thy bride prefer
Thy suit. O, could her woman's heart repel it ?
And if a daughter's voice, a daughter's prayer,
Present it to the king, is it not granted ?

JASON.

Right ; to Creusa will I breathe my wish ;
Nay, they themselves, in childhood's melting tones,
Shall utter it. Their infant innocence
Who unrelentingly could view ?

MEDEA.

His fate

He blindly, madly, doth pursue ! (*Aside.*) 'T is well ;
And for her hands I have prepared a gift,
A bridal gift, worthy a queen's acceptance.
Within this casket lies a jewelled crown ;
A gold-embroidered robe, of splendor such
As Corinth never saw ; take it, my sons,
Take it, and only in the princess' hands,
As from the humblest of her servants, place it.
Haste, and return successful !

JASON.

Doubt it not !

Who could resist their charms ? [*Exit with children.*]

MEDEA.

He loves them still !

Without there ! Order Lycus to my presence.

(*Enter LYCUS.*)

LYCUS.

Can he be distant when Medea needs him ?

What would the princess ?

MEDEA.

What ? Perchance thy life !

LYCUS.

'T is thine ! What wouldst thou for it ?

MEDEA.

Yonder palace,

Whose torches rival the bright god of day,

Whose sounds of revelry grate on my ear
Like shrieks of souls accursed ! A half-hour hence
See that the gorgeous dome blaze forth in splendor,
To fright Night from her throne, — a funeral pyre
Meet for a queen's repose !

LYCUS.

Lady, 't is done.

[Exeunt severall.]

ACT V.

SCENE I. *The vestibule of JASON'S palace.*

Enter MEDEA and IANTHE.

MEDEA.

'T is strange that I could sleep : we cannot always
Wrestle successfully with nature's claims.
Is it not midnight ?

IANTHE.

Lady, no ; your slumber

Was short.

MEDEA.

I feel as if long hours had passed.

IANTHE.

Scarce half an hour.

MEDEA.

Even so ? — Had it been longer
I should have missed the fairest sight that earth
Can now afford my eyes. O ecstasy !
The palace burns ! — it flames ! Like maddened steeds
The fiery columns dart toward the clouds !
Look, look, Ianthe ! Not Apollo's self,

As from their ocean bed his coursers spring
And clothe the world with light, e'er to my soul
Seemed half so glorious ! — Still onward bound,
Untamed, untamable, fleet steeds of vengeance !
Rear high your golden crests, and spurn control !

(*Enter LYCUS.*)

Welcome ! Thou 'rt safe ? — unharmed ?

LYCUS.

And unsuspected.

MEDEA.

I thank ye, gods ! But speak thy tidings ! haste !
Pour in my greedy ear all that hath chanced.

LYCUS.

Unseen, 'neath the huge dome th' insidious torch
I placed ; then mingled with the revellers.
The youthful bride I saw ; her flowing locks
Bound with the glittering crown, thy fatal gift.
The 'broidered robe adorned her form. Jason,
His sons dismissed to their wronged mother, turned
His eyes, with love and glad ambition bright,
Upon the princess —

MEDEA.

Peace, nor madden me !

LYCUS.

Pardon ! I would but say, e'en as he gazed
Her color faded ; from her pallid lips
A shriek of anguish burst ; fainting, she sank
In Jason's arms, her graceful limbs convulsed

By direst agonies ; around his neck
Her arms she strove to throw, and faintly murmured,
“ The fatal casket ! O, the gifts were poisoned ! ”
One groan, one struggle more, her pangs were ended.
Joyful that death had come to her relief,
I turned, and hither sped to bid thee fly,
If flight be practicable.

MEDEA.

Doubt it not.

Yet one word more, — said Jason aught ?

LYCUS.

These words, —

“ Sorceress, thy heart’s best blood shall answer this ! ”

MEDEA.

An oracle’s decree were not more sure !
To Juno’s shrine I haste. The secret passage,
Not e’en by Jason known, unseen admits me
Within the sacred walls. — My sons still sleep ?

IANTHE.

Ay, lady.

MEDEA.

On their lips I will impress
A parting kiss, then fly. For you, my friends, —
Hark ! — no ; they come not yet, — a slight delay
Secures me. Speed my course, propitious powers,
On to the goal of vengeance ! Let my foot
Fail not, heart quail not, hand and eye shrink not !

[Exit.

LYCUS.

She goes ; but to what end ? On every side
Destruction presses. Who can turn aside
The hot pursuit ? All Corinth will arise
'T' avenge a deed so bold.

IANTHE.

O Heaven, regard
A wife and mother wronged !

LYCUS.

Did Heaven regard
The woes of earth, these wrongs had never chanced.
Yet will it show this mercy ! — soon to end them.

IANTHE.

But how ?

LYCUS.

In death.

IANTHE.

Medea ! Death !

LYCUS.

Was she

Not born to die ?

IANTHE.

To conquer, not to yield,
Seemed to my mind her birthright. Must she die ?

LYCUS.

How live ? how 'scape ?

IANTHE.

Will not the temple shield her

LYCUS.

Dream not of it. She nurses not the hope.

IANTHE.

Yet she was calm.

LYCUS.

The calmness of despair.

She goes to die.

IANTHE.

Nay, Lycus — O, her sons !

They 'll ask me for their mother ! Must I teach them
What death is ?

LYCUS.

May their mother's enemies

Leave thee the task !

IANTHE.

Gods ! Will they raise their hands

Against those innocents ?

LYCUS.

Infuriate men

Pause not for such regards.

IANTHE.

I left them sleeping.

Can it be their last slumber ? Even now

A sudden horror thrills me ! Watch thou here

While to their couch I fly.

[*Exit.*]

LYCUS.

To what purpose

Should I watch here ? To view yon towering pile

Yield to the insidious flames, and hear the cries
Of fear, and rage, and horror, which the crowd,
Who gaze, send upwards to the crimsoned heavens ?
But hark ! What flying step ?

(Enter IANTHE.)

IANTHE.

O Lycus !

LYCUS.

What hast thou heard or seen to fright thee thus ?
Ianthé, speak ; if but a word !

IANTHE.

Blood ! [Faints]

LYCUS.

Blood !

Whose blood ? — She faints ! — Ianthe, my beloved,
Rouse thee ! Whose blood ? — What thought I dare not
speak

Distracts my soul ? — Ianthe ! — She hears not,
Breathes not, — perchance lives not ! Within there, help
[Exit, bearing IANTHE]

SCENE II.

Temple of JUNO ACREA. Altar and statue of the goddess. The bodies of
MEDEA's children before the altar. MEDEA.

MEDEA.

VENGEANCE hath had her perfect rites ! Now, now,
Welcome, ye hounds of Corinth ! — for I hear

Your distant voices clamoring for the prey, —
Welcome ! A woman's and a mother's hand
From your expectant grasp hath snatched the victims !
In horrid safety lay the new-fledged eaglets,
Whose eyes, just trained to meet the sun's fierce glance,
Relentless fate hath sealed in death. Death ! — death ! —
Unfathomable mystery ! my lips
Speak thy familiar name, and yet my soul
Rebels against thy power. Within my hand,
Fearless, unfaltering, I hold the knife,
Stern witness of thy doings, — near me lie,
Insensible to hope or fear, the sons
So loved, so worshipped, — but my heart feels not
Thy presence, visible, palpable, though it be.
For in the mirror of fast-flowing tears
Imagination paints my children's forms ;
The music of their voices fills my ear.
Enchantment of as strong, as blinding power
To mortal reason, as a mother's love,
Nor heaven nor hell can boast !
And yet this hand, nerved by infernal rage,
Hath stopped the gushing stream of life in veins
Fed from the fountain of this heart ! Ye gods !
Dare I to talk of love ? The very fiends
Mock at the sound, and, as the shivering earth
Gapes 'neath my feet accursed, from the abyss
Swarm the dire brood ; above, around, they press.
They bar each avenue of escape, proclaim

Me homeless and deserted of my kind,
And in my tortured ear their serpent tongues
Hiss forth a welcome to their vengeful band.
Hence, horrid shapes ! I 'm human still ! Hell taunts.
Earth shakes, mankind rejects, yet here I sink
Upon the bosoms of my slaughtered babes,
Here dare repose, nor powers of earth or hell
Shall fright me hence ; for here, at least, is peace.
Peace to the young, pure hearts which ne'er shall throb
Beneath the burden of Life's guilt and woe,
And peace to me, who in this marble stillness
Behold Heaven's dearest boon. And now one glance,
One last embrace, — the last on earth ! The rose
Hath scarce yet faded from your lips, my sons,
The smile still lingers there, as life were loath
To part from shrines so fair. Had ye awaked,
As with despair's fell strength your wretched mother
Grasped the dire steel, could I have done this deed ?
No, by the gods ! The heart once tasked to the bound
Of Nature's great endurance, oft a word
May strike with sudden force the quivering chord,
And free the wearied soul. Devoted babes,
Had sleep released you from its bonds, one glance
Had been Apollo's messenger ; my heart
Had burst beneath its power, and ye had lived, —
To glut Corinthian rage. I thank the gods
It is not so ! Upon your cheeks the icy chill of death
Thrills through my veins ; — 't is well, — I should be ster

For one more task remains, and then — to rest !
The step I watch for comes. Vengeance, instruct me
To teach his heart some knowledge of the pangs
Which rend my own !

(Enter JASON.)

JASON.

Detested fiend, who tempt'st
The wrath of men and gods, vainly thy feet
Pollute this sacred dome ! What seek'st thou here ?

MEDEA.

Safety.

JASON.

Thy words profane the goddess. She
Rears not her awful front within this dome
To stay the hand of justice.

MEDEA.

Nay, but to

Protect the injured.

JASON.

Let the guilty tremble !

MEDEA.

Tremble thou 'neath the chaste eye of the goddess,
Stern guardian of connubial faith, and swift
Avenger of the violated vow !
Hence, ere the lightnings of her wrath consume thee !

JASON.

Restore my sons ! Haste, for a hundred swords
Thirst for their blood and thine !

MEDEA.

Vainly they thirst.

Shall the pure stream, which, from the sacred fount
Of great Apollo's heart, courses these veins,
Brighten the dull steel of the robber race
Of Sisyphus ? Phœbus himself forbids ;
For me and for my sons a nobler way
He opes, — a proud escape !

JASON.

Vain, frantic woman !

For thee there 's no escape. Without regret,
I leave thee to thy fate. My children ! Speak !
Reveal their hiding-place ——

MEDEA (*taking a goblet from the altar*).

First let us pour

The full libation.

JASON.

Peace ! Darest thou profane

The sacred rites, and with thy blood-stained hands,
To the pure wife of Jove ——

MEDEA.

Nay, to the dead !

JASON.

The dead ! What dead ? Speak, woman ! hast thou
dared ——

MEDEA.

I have not dared ; — how should I dare, whose heart
Hath no communings with the spectral form

Which men call Fear ? — but I have done a deed
 Shall make earth tremble, and the pale moon shrink
 Beneath her canopy of clouds ; and, more,
 Shall teach the tyrant, man, that we, the weak,
 Frail beings, whom he fain would keep his slaves,
 Can rise in the strong armor of the soul,
 And hurl him to his native dust ! Behold !

[Showing the knife.]

JASON.

Yon crimson stain ! Say whence ! O gods, the view
 Curdles my blood with horror ! I must doubt
 Or die ! Thou hast deceived, to torture me ;
 I will forgive, and save thee, if thou wilt
 But say 't is not ——

MEDEA.

It is — thy blood and mine !

[JASON falls senseless.]

Well sped, keen shaft of vengeance ! Let me gaze
 My last upon the form whose peerless beauty
 Bewildered my young heart ! How changed am I,
 Since 'neath the wild, impetuous sway of Love
 I bowed, and, confident in Jason's faith,
 Braved the rude dangers of the deep, and sought
 This hostile shore ! Then, then I loved, — I loved
 As now I hate, ay, loathe, the prostrate form
 By falsehood stricken ! At my feet he lies,
 Unconscious of his woes, and I, who slew
 My sons, in slumber smiling, hold the knife

Above his breast ; yet him I could not strike
 Were worlds the price ! He was my husband ! — was ! —
 O, what an age of woe that “ was ” contains !
 My heart’s whole wealth was his ; my very being
 Seemed centred in his life and happiness ;
 Madly I loved, as madly have I punished !
 Yet, by the immortal gods, I could not harm him !
 O woman, to thy first, last, only love,
 What wondrous memories cling ! True, thou mayst hate,
 Condemn, despise, yet canst not all forget !
 How like to death this torpor ! Yet he lives,
 A victim sacred to the gods !

JASON.

Ah me !

Do I still live, or have I followed those
 I love to Pluto’s realm ? Ha ! I remember !
 Hast thou no lightnings, Jove ?

MEDEA.

Ay, to my hand

Hath he intrusted them ; ’t is thine to suffer !

JASON.

Woman, fiend, murderess, hence ! Thou second Gorgon
 Whose baleful beauty proves a curse more fell
 Than hers, what hast thou done ? They were thine
 own, —

Drew from thy bosom life, and, pillowed there,
 Slept the sweet sleep of infancy ; from thee
 Their rosy lips first learned to lisp the name,

The tender name, so outraged by thy deeds ;
They called thee "mother," yet thy hand has slain
them !

MEDEA.

By thee they perished ! Thy foul wrongs to me,
Thy vows profaned, thy household gods deserted,
Thy wife, thy sons, abandoned, to indulge
Thy roving fancy and thy black ambition,
Called with the thunder's voice on Heaven for vengeance !
And it is granted !

JASON.

Such a vengeance ! What
Should woman do with vengeance ? But thou art
No woman, but a Fury 'scaped from hell ;
"False to thy father, traitress to thy country,"
And stained in youth with kindred gore !

MEDEA.

Shameless !

Darest thou reproach me with the crimes which owe
Their birth to thee ? Strange to my soul they were,
Till thy false, fatal love darkened each sense
To all things but thy safety. 'T was for thee
Absyrtus bled. The deed was then a virtue,
But now, — yet he 's avenged !

JASON.

He is ;

"The wrathful Furies punish on my head
Thy crimes."

MEDEA.

Have they spared me ?

JASON.

Thy heart must bleed ; —

But no ! 't is marble, and thy fiendish nature
Thirsted for blood, “ thou tigress, of a soul
More wild, more savage, than the Tuscan Scylla ! ”
Sought'st thou revenge for thy imagined wrongs,
Why not in my heart's blood imbrue thy hands ?

MEDEA.

And bless thee with oblivion ! Were that vengeance ?
Me thou didst doom to hopeless life ; for this
Thy bride, thy sons, I slew, — th' expected throne
Snatched from thy eager grasp ! I see thee stand,
Like me, alone, and ask no other bliss !
“ Call me a tigress, then, or, if thou wilt,
A Scylla, howling 'gainst the Tuscan shore ! ”
For this I wrestled with my woman's heart ;
For this 'neath pangs Prometheus never knew
I writhed ! A rich requital from the gods
I reap in thy despair.

JASON.

Thy fiendish joy

Full soon must end.

MEDEA.

Hence, “ and entomb thy bride ” !

JASON.

Too well thou know'st the flames, meet instruments

Of hands like thine, have snatched from me that solace.
 Yet a more mournful task remains. "Yield me
 My sons, that I may mourn, and bury them."

MEDEA.

Never! in death, as life, they 're mine!

JASON.

Think not

To rob me of their ashes.

MEDEA.

Beneath Acrea's outstretched arm they lie,
 And who shall snatch them thence?

JASON.

Their father's hand!

The bleeding bodies of my slaughtered sons
 Thus do I snatch, despite——

MEDEA.

Forbear!

(Enter PRIESTESS of JUNO.)

PRIESTESS.

Forbear!

Nor dare insult the goddess! At her feet
 The precious relics lie! Dread to profane
 Her shrine! Retire, rude man!

(Enter on one side CORINTHIANS; LYCUS and LANTHE on the other.)

PRIESTESS.

Corinthians, back!

Respect this dome.

CORINTHIANS.

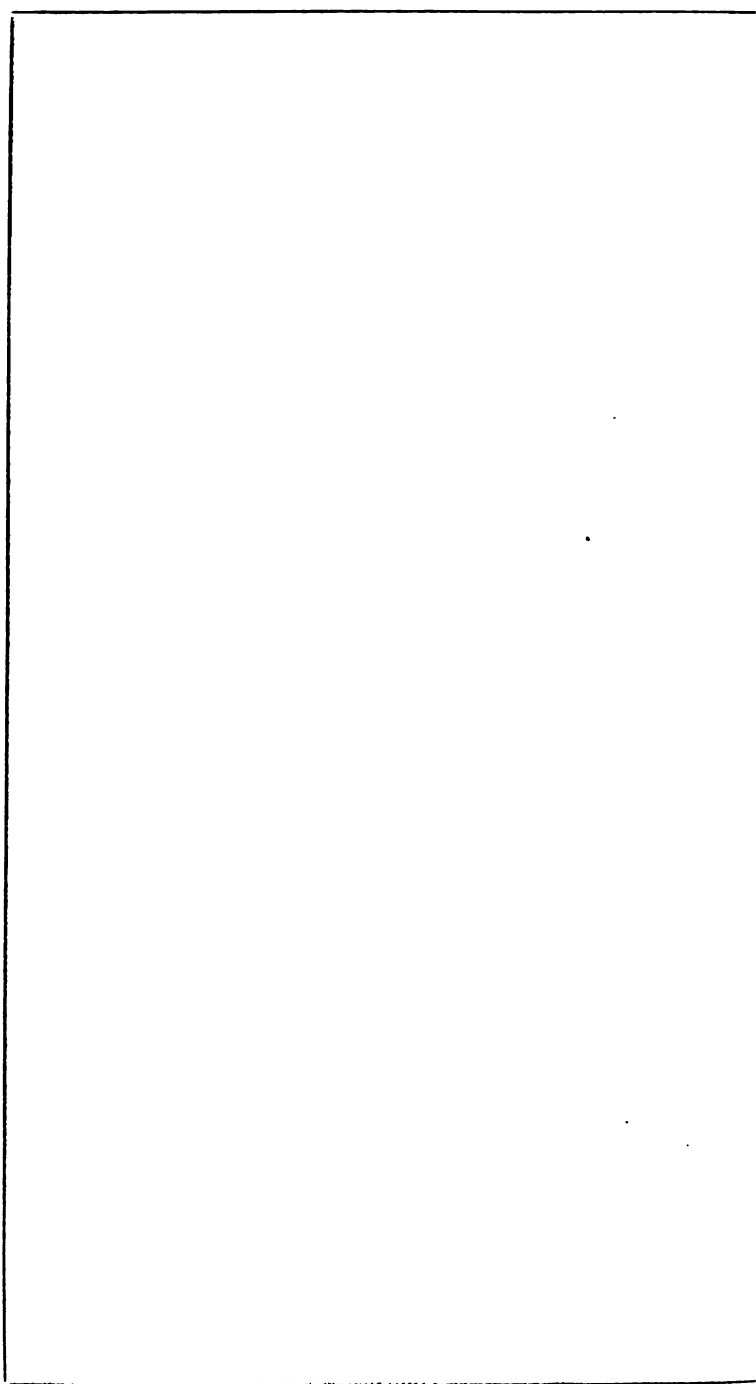
The goddess we revere,
But for the murderess, she is ours.

MEDEA.

Away,
Corinthian slaves ! To Fate, not you, I yield !
[Stabs herself.]

'T is done ! The blood, yet moist upon this steel,
Mingles again with the warm fountain whence
Its bright stream flowed ! — Ianthe, aid me near,
Yet nearer, to the sons my struggling soul
Burns to rejoin. Witness that as she lived
Medea dies, — in tameless, glorious freedom, —
Scorning, defying, mortal power ! For thee,
Ungrateful friend, false father, perjured husband,
My curse is on thee, — live ! *[Dies.]*

ERMINIA;
A TALE OF FLORENCE.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

GUIDO BUONDELMONTI, . . . *A young Florentine Noble.*
ROSSI, *His Friend.*
AMIDEI, *An old Nobleman of Florence.*
LAMBERTUCCIO AMIDEI, . . . *His Kinsman.*
MOSCA LAMBERTI, }
STIATTA UBERTI, } . . { *Allies and Kinsmen of the*
FIFANTI, } *Amidei.*
MANELLI, }
MALESPINI, }
ERMINIA, *Daughter to Amidei.*
LEONORA, *Her Friend.*
WIDOW DONATI.
COSTANZA, *Her Daughter.*
LUCIA, *Costanza's Attendant.*

Ladies and Gentlemen of Florence.

SCENE. *Florence.*



ERMINIA.

ACT I.

SCENE I. *A room in the Amidei palace. Enter ERMINIA
and LEONORA.*

LEONORA.

NAY, nay, Erminia ! Avoid your guests
On your betrothal eve ? The crowd, that wait
To view the noblest youth and fairest maid
All Florence boasts, will think you crazed. Come, come !

ERMINIA.

Dear Leonora, urge me not. My soul
Receives no pleasure from the dazzling show
Of vain respect ; my joy is all within.
Ah, leave my heart the bliss to gaze awhile
On its own happiness !

LEONORA.

You are too proud.

ERMINIA.

Say it be so, 't is my inheritance ;
The gift of nature, not th' effect of art.
I could not quell it, were 't to gain a crown.

LEONORA.

'There 's not another lady in all Florence,
Whose heart would not beat quicker if this throng
Assembled in her honor.

ERMINIA.

She, whose heart,
In the betrothal hour, throbs with delight
At incense offered to her beauty's power,
Save from her chosen knight, hath never loved !

LEONORA.

I 'll talk no more, for here Count Guido comes.
Now shall I see this stubborn mood of thine
Yield to thy lover's smiles.

(Enter BUONDELMONTI.)

BUONDELMONTI.

My Cytherea,
What cruelty controls thee ? Round thy shrine
Thy votaries throng, yet the capricious goddess
Veils her joy-giving face. Thy hand, my fair !

ERMINIA.

Thou, too, against me ?

BUONDELMONTI.

'Gainst thee, love ? how so ?
I would that she whom I adore should be
The worshipped of all hearts.

ERMINIA.

In very truth,
I ask to be the worshipped of but one.

And true it is, that, woman as I am,
 I 'd rather face these knights in war array,
 Than meet their eyes fixed on me, when they deem
 I woo their flattering glance.

BUONDELMONTI.

Dost thou contemn
 The homage of thy friends ?

ERMINIA.

I thank their kindness, —
 For such 't is meant ; but the contempt reserve
 For my unworthy self, if I should feel
 A wish t' indulge the tempter, Vanity,
 Despite the better voice within my heart.

BUONDELMONTI.

Thou 'lt not refuse thy lover this, perchance
 The last request the *lover* e'er may make
 Thus low, my fair ; — for my sake give consent !

ERMINIA.

Who can refuse when Buondelmonti pleads ?

(*Exeunt BUONDELMONTI and ERMINIA.*)

LEONORA.

Who can refuse when Buondelmonti pleads ?
 Not his Erminia : proud as she is,
 Naught knows she of that graceful tyranny
 Which takes delight in straining to the utmost
 The bonds of love, then loosing them again
 Ere they are weakened. Yet she has more power,
 With her mild dignity, than other maids,

However charmingly capricious, hold.
 Those whom she wins would be her slaves for life,
 And think the leave to serve her were a boon
 That kings might covet. Hark ! the voice of mirth
 And music echoes through the halls. I 'll fly,
 For one, at least, is watching for my step. [Exit.

SCENE II.

*A hall in the palace. Enter ERMINIA, BUONDELMONTI, AMIDEI,
 L. AMIDEI, UBERTI, ROSSI, and others.*

AMIDEI.

MAY these espousals prove a joyous prelude
 To nuptials still more joyous ! While we thus
 Make Love and Truth the columns of our state,
 Florence, united in herself, shall stand
 Unharmed amid the storm of war, whose wrath
 O'erwhelms each neighbouring province.

L. AMIDEI.

Ay, our strength

Lies in our union ; let no reckless hand
 Disturb this basis of our happiness ;
 But may each Florentine, like our good host,
 Confirm by wise and just alliances
 The interests of the state.

AMIDEI.

Let music sound ;

Lead forth the dance, and let your mirth proclaim
That Amidei's daughter is betrothed
To Buondelmonti's lord ! Let Florence hear
The joyful news, and know that, while her sons
Maintain such concord, war may vainly strive
To enter at her gates, which only discord
Can e'er unbar ! Come, gentle cavaliers,
Beseech your lovely dames to grace the dance.

[The knights and ladies dance.]

(Enter LEONORA.)

L. AMIDEI.

Fair Leonora, grant your hand, I pray !
Fain would I rouse Uberti's jealousy.

LEONORA.

Gallant confession ! So you ask my favor,
Not for my own sake, but to do despite
Unto your friend ? Indeed, it were but just
That every lady should reject your suit
For your discourteousness, and let you stalk
The phoenix of the evening.

L. AMIDEI.

Lady fair,
I will confess I dared not say how much
I prized thy grace, lest he should hear the tale,
And mar my suit.

LEONORA.

Thou hast so good a grace
In mending a lame speech, I'll pardon thee !

AMIDEI.

Now to the banquet, where the ruddy wine
Shall wake your mirth anew, and each shall pledge
His chosen fair.

(Exeunt all but ERMINIA, BUONDELMONTI, and UBERTI.)

UBERTI.

Though Florence may rejoice,
Yet many a heart within her walls is sad,
And greets with sighs and tears this festive hour.

ERMINIA.

Uberti jests ; or I have enemies
Of whom I dreamed not.

UBERTI.

Enemies, fair coz,
You can have none : despairing lovers mourn
That young Erminia's betrothals steal
From their benighted hearts hope's last faint ray.

BUONDELMONTI.

Speak you of lovers, sir ? Pray you, decide,
Am I not prince in Florence, since I 've won
Its greatest treasure ? Emperor and pope
May wrangle for the devastated fields
Of war-worn Italy ; not for their crowns
Would I exchange this triumph ! What care I,
That they with bloody laurels wreath their brows ?
Be mine the myrtle crown, whose hue, Erminia,
Is not more fadeless than my love for thee.

UBERTI.

You may be styled, in her right, prince of Florence ;
She rules its noblest hearts. Unhappily,
'T is with a sway that scarce can be transferred ;
For such allegiance as young knights bestow
Is selfish, and demands return ; and he
Who robs them of the price of their devoir
They will esteem their tyrant. Good my lord,
You will have deadly foes in Florence.

BUONDELMONTI.

Ay ?

In such a cause I 'd singly face a thousand,
And deem my life by far too poor a price
For my Erminia's love. I pray you, sir,
Are any of her desperate suitors here ?
For I would know them. If I chance to fall
In their good company I 'll fill my wine
In the Venetian goblet, and my hand
Shall rest upon my weapon's hilt, prepared
To win my bride anew.

UBERTI.

Mix with the guests,
And each who views you with a frowning brow
Note as your rival. But Erminia
Can name each sighing cavalier ; doubt not
Each victim is recorded in her heart.
And she has scores of trophies, — brodered scarfs,
Won in close field from many a hapless knight,

Laid by the victors at their tyrant's feet,
To prove their claim to glory and to love.
And she has moving lays from youths forlorn,
More plaintive than the last-expiring chords
Of Orpheus' lyre, which she, as barbarous
As his tormentors, hears with cruel pleasure.

ERMINIA.

Good cousin, cease ; this is the veriest fooling ——

UBERTI.

That e'er charmed maiden's ear ; runs it not so ?

ERMINIA.

That ever tortured maiden's ear. Uberti,
Had I your poignant wit, I might describe
A brodered scarf, worn next a young knight's heart ;
Not won in battle-field, but cunningly
Stolen from a lady's bower ; and I could tell
Of a bright shield, whereon a dagger's point
Has traced a name, which the unskilled might deem
Contained some powerful spell, since the proud knight
Doth gaze on it, and sigh, and quite forget
To shake the buckler in his foeman's face.

UBERTI.

I cry you mercy, coz !

ERMINIA.

Nay, 't is too late ;
You dared the combat. Shall I now reveal
That name, that magic name ——

UBERTI.

Beseech you, pardon

My forward tongue, and spare the mighty secret !

ERMINIA.

I will show mercy ; 't is the attribute
Of my weak sex. Go, seek some other victim
To sacrifice to the bright god of wit,
Whom you essay to worship.

UBERTI.

Nay, the god
Will find no offering on his shrine to-night ;
He hath not deigned to aid his votary,
But gives the victory to a woman's tongue.

ERMINIA.

O, be not humbled, cousin ; you will find
Yours oft the case of those audacious ones
Who enter in the lists of wordy war.
Shall we not join the revellers ?

BUONDELMONTI.

We are
Your captives, and must follow as you lead.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

*The chapel of the palace, dimly lighted. LAMBERTI discovered
kneeling before the altar.*

LAMBERTI (*rising and coming forward*).

LET me no more insult the immortal throne
With mortal anguish ! All in vain I seek,

Within this blest asylum of man's woes,
To conquer such regrets as rack the hearts
Of the condemned, who, from their drear abodes,
Behold heaven's gates closed on them. Not a hope
Illumines my despair. Which way I turn,
All things increase my frenzy. Here, even here,
The calm that doth pervade this hallowed dome
Soothes not my grief ; but recollection dire
Adds tenfold fury to my pangs. These walls
Have scarce yet ceased to echo to the steps
Of the espousal train. Erminia's voice
Seems still to linger here. At yonder shrine
She knelt in happiness, while I, poor wretch,
Far from the scene of splendor, hid my head,
And called on death !

(Enter UBERTI.)

UBERTI.

Who calls on death ? My friend !

LAMBERTI.

Go ! What care I for friends ? Away, I say !
Why dost thou trespass on my privacy ?

UBERTI.

Is 't not my privilege to share thy griefs ?

LAMBERTI.

I would hold converse with my misery
In solitude. The heart's most secret cells
Brook only to be bared by Him who made them.
I pray you importune me not. I am

At variance with myself, and scarce can have
More patience with another.

UBERTI.

In this mood
I will not leave you. Come, walk forth with me ;
The chapel's gloom oppresses you.

LAMBERTI.

I would.
That I could find some spot in all the earth,
Where none would play the spy upon me !

UBERTI.

Faith !
Thou art possessed, for such discourteous bearing
Belongs not to thy native mood ! Lamberti,
Shake off this weakness ! Be again yourself !
Brace on your armor, too long cast aside,
Nor let your friends suspect you have renounced
Your vows of chivalry. A belted knight
Is the world's champion, and has no right
To nurse love's fantasy while battle-shouts
Ring o'er Italia's plains. Shall we not forth
To-morrow, and rejoin the Emperor,
Who 'll gladly welcome us ?

LAMBERTI.

Such was my purpose.

UBERTI.

Thanks to the saints for the first words of reason
Thou 'st uttered for a month ! Lamberti lives
For Fame again !

LAMBERTI.

Fame !

UBERTI.

Wherefore dost thou name it
With such contempt ?

LAMBERTI.

It is not happiness !

UBERTI.

Time was you boasted Fame your bride.

LAMBERTI.

And still
Is she my bride. With her I 'll dare my fate, —
My hall the battle-field, my bridal song
The groans of dire despair, whose horrid notes
Will rise in due accordance with the joys
That fill the bridegroom's breast.

(Music faintly heard, as from a distance.)

Ah ! not for me
Those joyous strains. The trumpet-blast of death
Shall soon announce my hymeneal feast !

UBERTI.

O noble heart, how sadly art thou crushed !
But short time since, a silver clarion's voice
Charmed with its glorious melody not more
Than thy bold, equal tones ; but now, alas !
All is discordant ; sorrow's careless touch
Hath jarred the strings and spoiled the harmony. [Aside.
Lamberti, rouse thee ! While we linger here

Our laurels wither. They must taste again
The smoke and blood of battle. Come, my friend,
We are but recreant knights ; while thus we waste
The golden moments, newer aspirants
Will place their names o'er ours in Glory's list.
To thee Italia turns, and cries, " O, why
Doth young Lamberti shun the field of fame ? "

LAMBERTI.

Uberti, cease ! Thy words annoy my ear,
But make no impress on my o'er-wrought brain.
Fame ! glory ! honor ! bawbles are ye all !
Did I not seek them, as the plodding merchant
Seeks wealth, that I might purchase happiness ?
And hath she not escaped my eager grasp ?
Go to the merchant, when the famine's breath
Hath blighted the fair land, or pestilence
Stalks through the lofty city ; mock him, then,
As with deep groans he mourns the impending doom,
And say, " Look on thy gold, arise, be healed,
For thou didst love and seek it ! " Will he not
Bid thee behold the death-stamp on his brow,
And ask if gold be life ? Mock me not, friend ;
The plague-spot is upon my heart ! Not all
The homage of man's breath can cleanse the poison !
And yet thou talk'st to me of fame, as if
It were some talisman to charm away
The heart's deep malady !

UBERTI.

Each word I speak

He doth convert to aliment for his woe.
But, soft, here comes the author of this mischief.
She cannot make it worse ; perchance her words
May soothe Lamberti from this sullen mood.

(Enter ERMINIA.)

ERMINIA.

Uberti here ? I think 't is not your wont
To fly the banquet. Ah, my cousin Mosca !
You are a stranger, sir ; you did not grace
Our festival to-night.

LAMBERTI.

Your pardon, lady ;

I had a vow, — a penance to perform, —
A weary vigil, which would not permit
That I should be a reveller to-night.

ERMINIA.

Indeed ! Then Heaven forbid that I should seek
To draw such faithful vot'ries from its service !
And yet I think thou shouldst have paid thy vow
Some day ere this ; thy duty thus to Heaven
Had been discharged, nor would thy gallantry
Have stood impeached. You blush ! Fie, fie,
My gallant cousin, 't is not well in you
To put such slight upon a lady's bidding.

LAMBERTI.

Lady, will you condemn me all unheard ?

ERMINIA.

Had it been told me that you would have proved

Neglectful of my wishes, I 'd have waged
('T is well I did not !) on your courtesy
This chaplet of white roses on my brow.

LAMBERTI.

One bud of it were far too rich a gage
For my deserts.

ERMINIA.

You are my debtor, cousin,
For this neglect, and must redeem your fame ;
So, on my bridal eve, I charge you come
And sue my pardon for to-day's offence.

LAMBERTI.

Lady ——

ERMINIA.

Signor, denial will not pass.

LAMBERTI.

Erminia, take my life rather than force me
To such refinement of my misery !

ERMINIA.

Lamberti, I had thought ——

LAMBERTI.

Ay, you have thought
That I was of the giddy, heartless crew,
Who throng around you but to feast their eyes
Upon your beauty's blaze ; whose deepest feeling
Is that your cheek is fair, your eye is bright ;
Whose very glance profanes your worth. — Alas !
My tongue o'erleaps the barrier of my will !

It was my wish that you should deem me thus,
 And so erase me from your memory.
 Forgive me that I 've trespassed on your hearing !
 For I had no intent t' intrude myself,
 Darkening the sky of your bright festival
 By my o'erclouded presence.

ERMINIA.

You are wrong
 To term yourself intruder ; well you know
 You are an ever-welcome guest ; my sire
 Esteems you as a son, and I have held
 You ever as a brother.

LAMBERTI.

Far too near
 That title ; yet not dear enough.

ERMINIA.

I deemed
 That you had shaken off that idle dream,
 And turned again to thoughts more worthy of you.

LAMBERTI.

Would it were so ! — and yet I cannot wish
 You were less worthy, or myself less true.
 Erminia, to forget thee I must lose
 Each nice perception of my heart and brain,
 By which I know you loveliest of your sex, —
 The rarest maid that ever virtue crowned.
 True, I have dreamed ; the memory of that dream
 Will haunt me while I live, — to madness haunt me !

When I behold you not, gloom overpowers me,
And frenzy racks my soul. When you are near,
I tremble and would fly, but am enchained
By the most potent majesty of love.

ERMINIA.

Lamberti, cease ! The words I would not list
While I was yet mine own offend my ear,
Vowed to transmit the homage of but one
Unto my wedded heart. True, I am not
As yet a wife, but the betrothal rites
Precède but shortly that more sacred tie.
Yet do not think I blame you ; — I 'm in fault,
Since all unwittingly I forced your speech,
When you had fain been silent.

LAMBERTI.

Pardon, lady !

Thy sweet rebuke I justly have deserved.
Yet my heart's will would close my lips for aye,
Ere they should breathe a syllable to pain
Thy modest ear. O, may you never know
The pangs which you inflict ! Beseech you, now,
Pronounce forgiveness for the last offence
Lamberti will commit.

ERMINIA.

Cousin, I pray you,
Take not my words so gravely. Look on me
As a fond sister, and the change will drive
Uneasiness from both.

LAMBERTI.

When thou canst learn
To school thine own heart as thou urgest me, —
When, without murmuring, thou canst resign
Count Guido to another, and canst teach
Thy heart and lips to name him “ brother,” then
I can obey thee !

ERMINIA.

Ah ! his words strike deep !
How weakly do I seek to turn his love
By vain conceits, which could not change my own ! [*Aside.*
Cousin, adieu ! I trust we ’ll meet again
In calmer moments.

LAMBERTI.

No, Erminia !
This parting is our last ! Each time I sever
From thy dear presence is repeated death.
Why should I wilfully renew such pain ?

ERMINIA.

This is most sudden and unwelcome news ;
I trust thou ’lt not desert fair Florence so !

LAMBERTI.

O, say no word of favor, lest my heart
O’erleap the barrier resolution forms,
Again offending thee with its vain plaint,
Despite thy prohibition !

ERMINIA.

Fare thee well,

Good knight and true ; Heaven grant thee happiness !

LAMBERTI (*kneeling*).

Farewell, Erminia !

(*Exit ERMINIA.*)

Farewell to hope,

Farewell to joy ! — would 't were to life !

UBERTI.

Alas !

His passion knows no bounds, but in its fury
Enchains a soul which, but for that one weakness,
Has strength to rule a world. — Rouse thee, my friend ! —
He heeds me not. — Lamberti, art thou mad ?
Shake off this grief ! Trust me, Erminia
Were a far better soldier ; she would pay
Neglect like hers with scorn. Borrow some touch
Of her proud spirit.

LAMBERTI.

Pray thee, cease thy words !

Woe relishes no converse save its own,
And silence is its greatest comforter.
Uberti, by our friendship, leave me now !
I cannot brook that mortal eye should view
My weakness and my woe. At morning's dawn
We 'll meet. Good night.

UBERTI.

Even as you will ; good night.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

ACT II.

SCENE I. *A street on the banks of the ARNO.**Enter the WIDOW DONATI and Rossi, meeting:*

WIDOW.

SIGNOR, well met.

ROSSI.

Your servant, noble lady.

WIDOW.

In sooth, my lord, I would your words of greeting
Were more than courtesy.

ROSSI.

But honor me

With a command, you 'll find them so.

WIDOW.

I 'll test

Your friendship, sir. For many a tedious year
In my ambitious breast has dwelt a plan,
Unseen and unsuspected, yet not less
The guide of all my actions. Through the day
I slowly gathered power to force success ;
At night my dreams were of the accomplishment

Of my design. Now are my means full ripe ;
'T is time to act ; but yet I lack a friend
To set my scheme in motion.

ROSSI.

I am yours
For aught save treason 'gainst the state.

WIDOW.

O, fie,
Suspicious mortal ! wherefore such a clause ?
What ! Am I capable to stir such deeds
As most of men would start from ? Am I one
To o'erthrow governments and build anew
Upon their ruins ?

ROSSI.

Lady, you are one
Who, if you had the will, would find the power
For aught that mortal e'er achieved.

WIDOW.

Go to !
You are a flatterer ! — But truce ! My plot
Is one of marriage.

ROSSI.

What ! remate yourself ?

WIDOW.

Not I ! Too long I 've borne authority,
And queened it o'er my own domains, to shrink
Into a secondary star, and hide
My beams beneath a lord's imperious eye.
My daughter is the party.

ROSSI.

Daughter, say you ?

You must mistake ; rather your younger sister.

WIDOW.

If you will be true friend to my design,
Prithee cease fooling ; I 'm not in the mood.

ROSSI.

I will be grave as is his Holiness
When Germany looks fierce. Declare your will.

WIDOW.

Hark ! hark ! What melting sounds make glad the air
That sweeps from Arno's breast ?

(A long train of barges gayly decorated, containing ERMINIA, BUONDELONTI, LEONORA, AMIDEI, UBERTI, and others, appears upon the river.)

ROSSI.

The strain proceeds

From yonder train of boats.

WIDOW.

A gallant show,

Worthy our gallant city ! Pray you, sir,
What glad event do they thus celebrate ?

ROSSI.

Lady, you see the friends and followers
Of Buondelmonti's house, and also those
Of Amidei's blood. But the last night
The fair Erminia, Amidei's child,
To the young Buondelmonti was betrothed.

WIDOW.

Now Heaven forbid that thy lips utter truth !
No raven's voice with more unwelcome note
E'er croaked of death !

ROSSI.

Why should it anger you ?

WIDOW.

Fool that I am ! It is the overthrow
Of my so cherished scheme. 'T was to this end
I did entreat thy friendship.

ROSSI.

To what end ?

Thy passion soars so high it cannot stoop
To explain this sudden fire.

WIDOW.

Out on thy dulness,
That cannot guess what I forget to speak
Betwixt surprise and wrath ! It is this lord
To whom I 'd give my daughter.

ROSSI.

'T is too late.

WIDOW.

Thou shalt not say or think so ! While I live,
And time moves on, " too late " shall not exist !
I 'll blot those words, " too late," " impossible,"
Out of my language. Whoso utters them
Before my presence I 'll esteem my foe !

ROSSI.

Well, lady, I am promised to your service ;
What shall be done, and how ?

WIDOW.

O vile delay,
How hast thou punished me ! 'T is ever thus
With those who sport with Time. He doth avenge
Full dearly insult to his majesty.
Rossi, since first my daughter saw the light,
I have resolved to raise my house's fortunes
By wedding her with Buondelmonti's heir.
She hath been trained and tutored for his rank.
Such beauty, grace, and rare accomplishments ! —
Smile if you will ; no mother's vanity
Dictates my boast. Thou shalt behold, and own
My judgment cool. Describe Erminia.

ROSSI.

Have you not heard report of her ?

WIDOW.

I have ;
But Rumor's hundred tongues as much exceed
The simple truth, as hundreds one.

ROSSI.

Not here.

Walk on with me towards the river's brink,
And scan her features as she leaves the barge ;
Then wilt thou see the fairest of her sex
Since Helen ruined Troy.

WIDOW.

I 'll follow you ;
Then lead you to my house, where you 'll confess,
That as immortal Venus outshone Helen,
So far Costanza's beauty dims Erminia's.

SCENE II.

A room in the WIDOW DONATI's house. COSTANZA seated.

LUCIA attiring her.

COSTANZA.

THY hands are slow to-day, or else I lack
My wonted patience, Lucia. Now the mirror.
Fie on thee, girl, what spirit of awkwardness
Is in thy fingers ? O, these curls are stiff
As thou hadst meant them to perpetuate
Thy skill for ever ! If my glass is true,
No village maid upon her bridal day,
Fearful to move lest she should disarrange
Her wondrous finery, looks more prim than I.

*[Pulls the ornaments from her hair, and shakes
the curls over her neck and shoulders.]*

Here goes your labor ! Now my tiring 's done.
Lucia, thou 'st been abroad ; give me the news.

LUCIA.

Lady, there 's naught so new as thine own whims ;
Each minute brings a fresh one.

COSTANZA.

Thank thy stars
That thou art spared the tediousness of old ones !

LUCIA.

That 's my sole comfort, — the variety
Of your caprice. Did you not change so oft,
I should expire of weariness.

COSTANZA.

Alas !
If I had not such whims, into what channel
Wouldst thou disperse the current of thy spleen ?

LUCIA.

Perchance upon your mother.

COSTANZA.

Why on her ?

LUCIA.

Because she so o'erloads the packhorse, patience,
With lecturing on thy beauty and thy grace.

COSTANZA.

Is this the news ?

LUCIA.

Ah, no ! 't is old as thou art.
But there is news abroad thou 'lt joy to hear.
Last night the young Erminia was betrothed
To Guido, heir of Buondelmonti's house.

COSTANZA.

Lucia, can this be true ?

LUCIA.

Lady, e'en so.

COSTANZA.

Perish Lamberti's love, and from its tomb
My hopes shall soar ! Say, heardst thou aught of him ?

LUCIA.

'T is said Lamberti has resolved to join
St. John's bold champions.

COSTANZA.

Say no more, my girl.

O, I am sick at heart that I have given
My love unto a knight, who foolishly
Hath chased the shadow that still fled his grasp,
And scorned the treasure that he might have won !
I am revenged, in that Erminia
Slights him as he slights me.

LUCIA.

Ah ! love is blind,
Or he would see how much Costanza's charms
Exceed Erminia's.

COSTANZA.

Yet she is fair.

LUCIA.

She 'd seem but common, place her by your side.

COSTANZA.

She is too tall, yet she hath majesty.

LUCIA.

You have most grace, so you need not be rivals,
Differing so much.

COSTANZA.

Ay, true. Should a sylph seek
To emulate Diana, or Diana
Pine to exchange her huntress mien, to wear
The sylph's unfettered motion ? Yet I would
I knew the charm by which she won her cousin !

LUCIA.

They grew beneath the selfsame roof.

COSTANZA.

Even so.

If that 's a reason for his love to her,
She should love him.

LUCIA.

Had ever love a reason ?

COSTANZA.

Ay, girl, my love for him.

LUCIA.

Is 't possible ?

I should not have divined it.

COSTANZA.

Say'st thou so ?

I love him that he hath the noblest bearing
Of any knight in Florence ; then his fame
In knightly deeds might win a lady's heart ;
And, lastly, I would pierce his stubborn breast,
Because it is so stubborn 'gainst my smiles,
And that the maid who wins Lamberti's hand
Will wring the hearts of half her sex in Florence.

LUCIA.

Three reasons ; but the last most apt of all !

COSTANZA.

I see not how Erminia should control
Lamberti's heart so strongly, for she seems
Indifferent of conquest. Now I think
That, with more cunning, I can wider spread
Beauty's dominion ; for I can command
Every gallant by his own vanity ;
For each one thinks it is for him I sigh,
And each one is persuaded, past all doubt,
That he is knighthood's mirror, and his worth
Dimming each rival's fame. I would so rule,
That for each smile I could command a life.

LUCIA.

O grasping vanity ! how many ways
Thou seek'st for thy indulgence !

[*Aside.*]

COSTANZA.

See who comes.

LUCIA.

Thy mother, and a stranger by her side.

COSTANZA.

Perchance I 'll now hear more of this betrothal.
The sound is music to my ear.

(*Enter WIDOW and ROSSI.*)

WIDOW.

My lord,

This is my daughter whom I named to you.

Costanza, Signor Rossi is a friend
Whom you must favor.

COSTANZA.

Sir, I am well pleased
To bid you welcome.

ROSSI.

Lady, I am happy
That I am thus permitted to behold
The gem of Florence.

COSTANZA.

You are courtly, sir.
Dear mother, what news bring you from abroad ?

WIDOW.

You shall know by and by. Perchance I 'll tell
What will not discontent you. Stand aside,
While I hold conference with this gentleman.

[COSTANZA and LUCIA retire.

What think you further of the plan I named ? [To Rossi.

ROSSI.

The Count is yours.

WIDOW.

Does not Erminia wane
Beneath this sun of beauty ?

ROSSI.

I will speak
With honesty. To me, Erminia
Is far more lovely ; but my friend, the Count,
Is giddy, fickle, and one winning glance

From yonder maid will bring him to her feet,
Enslaved as Hercules to Lydia's queen,
Or Antony to Egypt's. Novelty
Is his divinity, and vanity
Doth more than love control his bridal choice.
It is his boast, that Buondelmonti's wife
Shall be the empress of Italia's fair.
There is no point, no shadow of resemblance
Between your daughter and Erminia ;
Neither would suffer by comparison
With her fair rival ; but the novelty
Of young Costanza's beauty will enchain
Count Guido's roving eye.

WIDOW.

'T is now your part
To lure him hither.

ROSSI.

That shall soon be done.
Hath she the wit to bear this scheming out ?
Trust me, 't is not her face alone can bind
Our whimsical gallant. If her sweet voice
Discourse not in such sort to enchant his ear,
His eyes will speedily throw off their bondage.
Say, hath she art ?

WIDOW.

A true Italian brain.

ROSSI.

She shares your secret ?

WIDOW.

O, content you, sir !

I 'm not so mere a woman. She is free
Who knows not how she 's ruled. Nature 's perverse,
Prone to rebellion since the days of Eve.
I prompt ambition and forbid not love ;
So hath she not th' original temptation
And spur to disobedience.

ROSSI.

But 't is time . . .

She were prepared to second your design.

WIDOW.

Daughter, approach. Think'st thou a coronet
Would grace those flowing locks ?

COSTANZA.

Mother, I would

The question were less idle.

WIDOW.

Say'st thou so ?

Would not thy head ache 'neath such weight of honor ?

COSTANZA.

And if it did, the pain were far more welcome
Than any pleasure. But why trifle thus ?

WIDOW.

Obey me, and the coronet is thine.

COSTANZA.

And by what means ?

WIDOW.

Marriage. Do you consent ?

COSTANZA.

Not till I see the noble from whose hand
The gift shall come.

WIDOW.

Count Guido Buondelmonti.

COSTANZA.

Mother, you mock me, or your brain is turned !
He to an Amidei is betrothed.

WIDOW.

The tie shall be dissolved.

COSTANZA.

This passes patience !

WIDOW.

Be calmer, dear. This gentleman doth vouch
That young Count Guido can be won by thee.

COSTANZA.

The gentleman is over-generous !
My grateful heart doth lack the wit to frame
An answer suited to his courtesy,
In thus bestowing on my humble self
The fair Erminia's lover ! Much I fear
The lady and the Count are ignorant
Of their rich luck in such a faithful friend.

ROSSI.

The lady hath a tongue !

[Aside.]

WIDOW.

Costanza, cease !

Say, if I bring the coronet to your feet,
Will you accept it ?

COSTANZA.

Ay ; I would it were
Th' imperial crown ; it is the richer gift ;
Pray you, let it be that !

WIDOW.

Well, infidel,
Be thou attired as best may suit the rank
To which I will advance thee.

COSTANZA.

Would I dared
To swear, that till I see the coronet
No other ornament shall grace my head !

WIDOW.

Rossi, we will retire, and further plan
To benefit this unbelieving girl.
Costanza, get thee gone, and deck thyself
As I commanded. I will tell thee more
When I return.

[Exeunt WIDOW and ROSS.]

COSTANZA.

Well, Lucia, lend thy wit,
And aid me to expound this riddle.

LUCIA.

I ?

I am bewildered ! But it seems some plan
Has risen in your mother's restless brain,
To wed you to this Count.

COSTANZA.

I have long known

That what she wills she 'll do ; yet her last words
Seem so absurd, that, but I know her wit
Is seldom at default, I much should fear
She were distraught.

LUCIA.

Wilt thou be ruled by her
If she has reason in her strange commands ?

COSTANZA.

I will. Who would not be obedient
At such a price ? — to wear a coronet !
O, in my dreams I 've worn a jewelled crown !
But I 'll content me with the coronet.

LUCIA.

Imperial dreamer ! thy dread majesty
Already hath forgot the one loved knight !

COSTANZA.

No more of him ! I now shall be revenged
Upon all sides. Lamberti slighted me
For fair Erminia's love, and she in turn
Revenged my slight by loving Buondelmonti.
Now, if I win her lover, I shall be
Dearly revenged on her, who caused Lamberti
To scorn the heart he knew he could have gained.

LUCIA.

And this will cure your love ?

COSTANZA.

Harp not on that !

I think the golden circlet's blaze in time
Will quite consume it.

LUCIA.

I have heard it said
Erminia loved this lord.

COSTANZA.

I loved Lamberti,
But yet she kept him prisoner.

LUCIA.

'T was his fault,
But sure not hers, since she would none of him.

COSTANZA.

If I gain Buondelmonti, she may wed
Lamberti to revenge herself on me.

LUCIA.

Heaven grant no worse revenge may come than that !
Methinks 't is ominous, that the word " revenge "
Falls from your lips so oft.

COSTANZA.

Prate not of omens,
But follow me. I will array myself
As my shrewd mother wished, and wait the end.

[Exit COSTANZA]

LUCIA.

That ever Cupid should beguile thee thus,
And, in his malice, lure thee to believe
Thou couldst love any save thy own sweet self !
In faith, Lamberti is far happier

Mourning Erminia's indifference,
Than to love thee and be beloved in turn.
But for this Count, if he can prove so faithless
As to forsake his fair betrothed for thee,
Why, he deserves thee ; so saints grant him patience !
Who weds Costanza will have need of it ! [Exit.]

SCENE III.

A street in Florence. Enter BUONDELMONTI and ROSSI.

BUONDELMONTI.

WHY didst thou shun our mirth to-day ?

ROSSI.

My lord,

As I was hastening to the river's brink
I met a friend, a lady. We conversed
Of you and your Erminia. At that time
Your brilliant train passed by, and she besought
I would escort her to the water's edge,
That she might view the maid, our city's boast.
Could I refuse her ?

BUONDELMONTI.

No. What said the dame ?

ROSSI.

She said what, uttered by a cavalier,
And thus repeated, would bring on a combat.
She vowed she had a daughter fairer far

Than fair Erminia, and thereupon
Did urge me to her dwelling, that my eyes
Might judge if she spoke truth ; and thus it is
That I have been a truant.

BUONDELMONTI.

Who is she
Who robbed me of my friend.

ROSSI.

She is the widow
Of a Donati.

BUONDELMONTI.

Ay ? I know her well ;
A cunning dame ; I warrant me she spread
This snare to win a husband for the maid.
How say you, friend, will you too wed ?

ROSSI.

My lord,
The maid is not for me ; she is designed
For one far higher.

BUONDELMONTI.

Who 's the happy man
That shall possess her ?

ROSSI.

That I cannot tell.
But he should be as great as Jupiter,
And have the world within his glance and grasp,
If he would ask a fairer bride.

BUONDELMONTI.

Ah, ha !

She cannot rival mine. Rossi, you smile,
As if I were too boastful. By the gods,
I 'll see the lady and confound your judgment,
Which to a sun compares a satellite !
Come, you shall guide me.

ROSSI.

Faith, not I, my lord !

BUONDELMONTI.

Deny so slight a favor to a friend ?

ROSSI.

Shall I encounter fair Erminia's frowns ?
Give up this whim, my lord ; I was too thoughtless,
Knowing your giddy humor, in repeating
The morn's adventure. Let us to the palace,
And woo Erminia's sunny glance. In faith,
She 'll scarce smile on you if you play the truant
Upon this day.

BUONDELMONTI.

Nay, I 'm not yet enslaved,
And shall make free to borrow so much time
As may suffice for me to view this maid ;
For, from your backwardness, I much suspect
That you have left your heart in her sweet keeping.
Say, will you go ?

ROSSI.

Indeed, my lord, not I.

BUONDELMONTI.

Well, I will plead your cause.

ROSSI.

Give o'er this whim.

BUONDELMONTI.

Fie, Rossi ! jealousy but ill becomes thee.
What ! play the dragon of the Hesperian garden
Ere yet the fruit is yours ? I am resolved
To view this treasured beauty ; so adieu. [Exit.

ROSSI.

You have well proved your right descent from Eve !
But I, who play the serpent and present
This fair temptation to your view, may fail
To win the paradise from which I lure you.
And yet, Erminia, you will be free,
And may again be won ; so with that hope
I must content myself, till time shall show
If Guido's fickle heart be wrought upon
According to our scheme. I 'll after him,
Lest some unthought-of hindrance should occur
To mar the widow's wishes and my own. [Exit.

SCENE IV.

*A room in the WIDOW DONATI's house. Enter the WIDOW
and BUONDELMONTI.*

WIDOW.

My lord, this pleasure 's great as unexpected ;
Your presence honors me.

BUONDELMONTI.

The honor 's mine,
In paying duty to you, noble lady.

WIDOW.

I should congratulate the gallant Count
That he has won our city's fairest maid
To share his rank ; although I must lament
That my own hopes are blighted. I had dared
To think my daughter might become the place
Which Buondelmonti's dame must hold, and thus
(Ah, vainly !) I reserved her hand for you.
Let me present her, that your eyes may judge
If I but dreamed her charms deserved your notice.

[Exit WIDOW.]

(Enter ROSSI.)

ROSSI.

Guido, fly ! O, fly !
Fall not into a snare so palpable !
Thou seest the dragon of th' Hesperian garden
Gapes to devour thee !

BUONDELMONTI.

But the memory
Of my Erminia's charms will prove an ægis
To ward off this attack.

ROSSI.

Best not to prove
The strength of thy so-boasted shield too far !
Costanza comes. Rash knight, now close thine eyes,
Or yield thee prisoner, rescue or no rescue !

(Enter WIDOW and COSTANZA.)

WIDOW.

Behold the maid whom I reserved for you.

BUONDELMONTI.

Have I been cursed with madness, that I deemed
I had seen beauty ere I saw Costanza ?
Thus shone the Paphian goddess when fierce Mars
Owned the keen shaft of her mischievous boy !
Since you have deemed me worthy of her hand, [To WIDOW]
I should be most ungrateful to decline
What royalty might covet.

ROSSI.

So ! 't is done !

Unto what saint shall I erect a shrine
For this achievement ?

[Aside]

BUONDELMONTI.

To Costanza. Goddess (for I dare not
To call thee less, and cannot call thee more),
Thy mother hath bestowed thee on a mortal,
Who prays thee to confirm the precious gift !

COSTANZA.

Must I descend from my divinity
To be a mortal's bride ?

BUONDELMONTI.

Diana shunned

The gods, yet smiled upon Endymion ;
And thy great prototype, bright Venus, loved
To glide from high Olympus, and to rove

With young Adonis upon earth. Wilt thou
Affect more state than they ?

COSTANZA.

Ah, no, my lord !
Conquered like them, like them I yield my heart,
Trembling lest you should scorn so quick a triumph.

BUONDELMONTI.

Venus, thou art propitious ! Love, thy lips
Must seal the bond for thy heart's truth.

ROSSI (*as if going*).

My friend,
What message have you for the Amidei ?

BUONDELMONTI.

Stay, Rossi, stay ! I need thy cunning brain.
If ever thou hast loved me, aid me straight,
By moving heaven and earth, to win the Pope
To grant a dispensation from the rite
Which I too hastily embraced !

ROSSI.

The spell
Works wondrously ! (*Aside.*) Guido, my will is yours.
But I must have more close instructions ere
I stir in an affair so grave.

BUONDELMONTI.

So grave !
Talk I of murder, Rossi ?

ROSSI.

Ay, of that

Which may lead to it ! (*Aside.*) Briefly, this affair
Involves two parties ; Amidei stands
On one side, setting forth his daughter's wrong ;
I, on the other, pleading for remission
Of Buondelmonti's contract. How think you
His Holiness decides ?

BUONDELMONTI.

I have no thought
For aught beyond my bright enchantress here.
Do as you will ! — Let my petition reach
The Papal throne ere Amidei's plaint.
Say that my house is far more powerful,
More wealthy far, than any house in Florence,
And that we ever have confessed his claim
To Italy's dominion. Love forefend !
Methinks I 'm growing politic ! O, haste !
Block up all avenues to his Holiness,
Until my suit is won ! Spare not for gold !

ROSSI.

With all the haste I can, still Amidei
May reach the Papal throne in time to mar
His Holiness' consent ; unless 't is gained
Before the injured represent their cause,
I fear that you will be compelled to make
Your contract good.

BUONDELMONTI.

Prometheus' fate be mine,
If I swerve from my homage to this maid !

Nor pope nor emperor shall bar my will !
This hour I 'll wed, — then humbly sue the Church
To grant forgiveness. Haste, my fairest love,
T' assure thy subject's happiness.

COSTANZA.

My lord,

I 'm yours.

BUONDELMONTI.

My heart's great empress ! What devotion
Can I bestow, to thank thy swift compliance
With my rude eagerness to call thee mine ?
Fortune may store for me some woman's caprice,
And snatch away this brightest of her smiles
With the same haste she gave it. In that fear,
I will not quit this hand till it is mine
Beyond recall ; nor will I take mine eyes
From thy fair brow, until my coronet
Confine those flowing locks which, in rich freedom,
Stray o'er thy graceful neck, and enviously
Strive to conceal its beauty.

COSTANZA.

Ah, my lord,

How dare I hope this mood will last ?

BUONDELMONTI.

My life

Must vanish ere I cease to adore thy charms !
Dare I ask equal love from thee ?

COSTANZA.

My life

Must vanish ere I cease to adore — thy rank ! [*Aside.*

BUONDELMONTI.

Sweet echo ! Wiser than Narcissus was,
I eagerly embrace the matchless treasure.
Thou 'rt robed as would become even royalty
Upon the bridal day ; there 's no delay
Need interpose between us and the altar.

WIDOW.

You 're right ; the bridal must not be postponed,
Lest some untimely interruption hap.
So let us to the chapel, where with speed
The marriage shall proceed, whose sacred bond
Cannot be lightly shaken off. This way !

[*Exeunt.*

ACT III.

SCENE I. *A street in Florence. Enter Rossi.*

ROSSI.

So he is wedded, and cannot retract,
And fair Erminia 's free ! Now, my next step
Requires more wit, — more caution, delicacy.
Shall I haste to the lady, and inform
Of Buondelmonti's treason ? Much I fear
She 'll hate the bearer for the tidings' sake.
I will so manage to be in her presence
When the ungrateful news first meets her ear,
Then, feigning ignorance, I will espouse
The lady's cause, and in most gallant rage
Threaten to pour forth Buondelmonti's blood.
Yet, if she love him, she will scarce feel favor
To one who aims at his dear life ; but since
'T will be for her sake, woman's vanity
Will plead my pardon. O, beshrew my wit !
I am in love, which makes me cowardly,
Fearing to fix my choice on any course,
Lest all my hopes should fall there. I must rest

On something ere the storm bursts forth, lest I
 Should be esteemed a favorer of this bridal,
 And excommunicated from the presence
 Of her, for whom alone I 've ta'en the pains
 To aid the deep, intriguing Dame Donati
 In her unmatched essay. I 'll to the palace,
 And then, inspired by fair Erminia's eyes,
 Determine on my future course, and hope
 Shall make me bold in my nice enterprise.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II.

An apartment in the AMIDEI palace. Enter LAMBERTI and UBERTI.

UBERTI.

WHAT means this heavy cloud upon thy brow ?
 Why are thine eyes, but late cast down with grief,
 Now lighted up with such a sullen glare
 As marks Vesuvius' gathering wrath ?

LAMBERTI.

My friend,
 Dishonor rests upon us. Buondelmonti —

UBERTI.

Ha ! What of him ? What hast thou done ?

LAMBERTI.

My shame
 Is that I have not done as you suspect.
 Uberti, know that the false Count is wedded, —

Wedded within the hour to a Donati !
Flung to the winds are all the lover's vows,
The sacred rites profaned, and that high heart,
Which knew no weakness save in loving him,
Is trampled on, and treated with such scorn
As a barbarian Turk might cast upon
One of his hundred fawning slaves ! O Heaven !

UBERTI.

And lives he still ?

LAMBERTI.

He lives, and dreams, perchance,
Our hearts, like his, are callous to the claims
Of loud-voiced honor ! O Erminia !
Who shall repeat the story of thy wrongs,
And wake thine ear to misery's chilling voice ?

UBERTI.

Her woe doth more unman you than your own.

LAMBERTI.

Methinks some fiend lurks round me, dear Uberti.
The thought of her distress distracts me ; yet
I dare not search my heart, lest I should find
More joy at his unworthiness, than grief
For her who suffers by it. Down, base thoughts !
Ye are unworthy of me ! Counsel me,
How shall we break this unexampled act
To poor Erminia ? Who will undertake
So hard a task ?

UBERTI.

Her father ?

LAMBERTI.

Most unfit !

He will more rave at th' insult to his house
Than at his daughter's grief. My dear Uberti,
You are a friend and kinsman ; let this task
Devolve on you.

UBERTI.

No, no ! I am unfit
To be misfortune's herald. My wild mood
Erminia knows, and she will surely deem
I seek to put a cruel jest upon her.

LAMBERTI.

Perhaps young Leonora would consent
T' inform her friend.

UBERTI.

She has not so much courage
As to inform Erminia if false Guido
Had wounded his least finger. Ah, Lamberti !
This must be your part.

LAMBERTI.

'T is impossible !

O, how degrading would it seem for me,
A slighted lover, to be first to sound
My favored rival's great unworthiness !
Erminia comes, and with a glance so free
From every shade of care, that 't were as well
To scatter pestilence on the pure air,
And turn that first of blessings to a curse,

As to invade her peaceful, happy heart
With news which must so harshly blight its joys.

(Enter ERMINIA, LEONORA, AMIDEI, and ROSSI.)

By Heaven ! Count Guido's shadow, Rossi, here !
O impudence unparalleled ! *[Aside to UBERTI.]*

ERMINIA *(to LAMBERTI and UBERTI.)*

My friends,
You 're ever welcome ! Most so when surprise
Enhances pleasure. I supposed ere this
You 'd left fair Florence far behind.

UBERTI.

Lady,
Such was our purpose ; unforeseen events
Make us again your guests.

ERMINIA.

Methinks you 're grave.
My Leonora, have you frowned on him ?

AMIDEI.

Perhaps he has deserved the lady's frowns,
And looks thus grave from the rebuke of conscience.

UBERTI.

Granting my own unworthiness, I still
Must wish each knight, who woos a lady's favor,
Were constant as myself. Fair Leonora,
Grant me a moment's audience.

[LEONORA and UBERTI converse aside.]

AMIDEI *(to ROSSI.)*

Signor,

Pray, when may we expect the noble Count ?

ROSSI.

Would I could answer you ! We parted last
Some two hours since, and then I urged him much
To hasten here with me ; but he replied,
He must make bold to borrow so much time
From his Erminia as would suffice
To visit a fair lady, of whose charms
A loud report had reached him.

ERMINIA.

Say you so ?

Ah ! Signor Rossi, in your glance I read
That you would gladly rouse my jealousy.
You 'll find my vanity impregnable ;
I 'll even dare inquire the lady's name,
Who interferes with my prerogative
Of seeming fair in Buondelmonti's eyes.

ROSSI.

She 's called Costanza, of Donati's house.

LAMBERTI.

Can I bear this ! — Thou parasite of him,
Whom in this presence I forbear to style
As he deserves, how darest thou linger here,
Torturing this lady's ear with thy vile taunts ?
Begone, if thou wouldst live !

ROSSI.

Ha ! dost thou threat ?

Come on ! I am as well inclined as thou.

[Draws.

ERMINIA.

Lamberti, are you crazed ?

LAMBERTI (*to Rossi*).

Vile tool, begone !

I cross not swords save with the principal
In this foul deed !

AMIDEI (*to LAMBERTI*).

Why, nephew, is this well ?

The honor due to me should save my guests
From open insult.

LAMBERTI.

O, your pardon, sir !

Command that reptile forth, and I will show
The reasons of my actions.

AMIDEI.

Sure you 're mad !

LAMBERTI.

For your sake, sir, I would that I were mad,
And that the motives for my violence
Were but the monsters of a heated brain.
When he goes forth, I speak.

AMIDEI (*to Rossi*).

Forgive me, sir,

That, in accordance with my nephew's wish,
I pray your absence. This so rude request
Impute not to inhospitality,
But my anxiety to understand
How far this matter doth concern me.

ROSSI.

Sir,

I am your servant. Lady, let me hope
Some future day to justify myself.
For you, the time will come ——

[To LAMBERTI.

LAMBERTI.

To punish thee !

[Exit ROSSI.

AMIDEI.

Nephew, explain to us your ill-timed frenzy.

LAMBERTI.

Uberti, aid me ! Leonora, you
Can give my reasons utterance. —

(They decline by gesture.)

No help ?

ERMINIA.

Ah, Leonora, do you weep ? Speak, speak
This mystery ! Why do you hesitate,
And gaze on me with such embarrassed eyes ?

LAMBERTI.

And must I be th' unwilling instrument
To strike Erminia's heart ? Then nerve thyself
As if I were thine executioner !
This day th' indissoluble marriage-bond
Has joined Count Guido to the fair Costanza,
Whom Rossi named.

ERMINIA *(after a pause)*.

Must I believe the shaft

Of woe can have been winged by Guido's hand ?

AMIDEI.

Lamberti, as you are the soul of honor,
I cannot doubt. Say on.

LAMBERTI.

The tale, my lord,
Was told me by the priest that wedded them ;
A holy man, who shrank with grief and horror
When I declared the former rites. From him
I learned that Rossi was an instrument
In this foul treachery.

AMIDEI.

So this stripling dares
To trifle with the honor of my house !
'T were safer far to pluck the lion's mane !
Give me my armor ! — I 've not borne its weight
For many a year, but now I 'll brace it on,
And wield again my sword, and show this boy
That the right arm which, for full fifty years,
Hath served the state can yet maintain my honor !

[Attempts to draw his sword, but fails.]

O, I am old ! my wrath is impotent !
But since my own strength fails t' avenge my wrongs,
All Florence shall arise in my behalf !
What ! sue for an alliance with my house !
To be betrothed, then wed with another !
If to the basest clown the city owns
He had shown such foul scorn, such shameless breach

Of honor's laws, he should be hooted forth
From knighthood's pale ; but since on me, on me,
This outrage vile hath fallen, what shall atone,
What cleanse my tarnished honor, save his blood !

ERMINIA.

O !

AMIDEI.

Girl ! dost thou lament ? Aid me to curse
The man, who dares to make thee such a mark
For the keen shaft of pity and of scorn !

ERMINIA.

In mercy lead him hence !

UBERTI.

Signor, I pray you,
Retire with me. We will consult apart
At leisure on this business.

AMIDEI.

O, Uberti,

This is a fearful stroke !

[*Exit, supported by UBERTI.*]

LEONORA.

Her stern, fixed gaze affrights me ! O, Erminia,
Gaze not on me with such unearthly eyes !
I cannot stay ! Say, shall I call her women ?

LAMBERTI.

No ! let no menials witness this distress,
It is too sacred for their careless gaze.

LEONORA.

Such misery is infectious ; let me summon
Other attendance.

ERMINIA.

No ! no other eyes
Must view my agony.

[*Exit* LEONORA.]

LAMBERTI.

Erminia !

ERMINIA.

What would Lamberti ?

LAMBERTI.

Pardon, dearest lady,
If I have seemed too forward in inflicting
This wound upon thy peace !

ERMINIA.

I blame thee not ;
But, from the weapon that achieved the blow,
Look to the hand that guided it ! O Heaven !
How rudely am I roused from happy dreams ! —
Too happy to be true ! O, I have raised
An altar of idolatry to one
Who proves mere mortal, and am justly punished
In my false god's desertion ! But the fire
Of Italy's best days is in my breast ;
I 'll dare as Rome's proud daughters might have dared !
Lamberti, as I silent stood, benumbed
By misery's rude shock, dark visions rose

In my o'ertortured brain !

(Lamberti kneels and presents his sword.)

Ay, even so !

LAMBERTI.

Lady, I am thy slave !

ERMINIA.

O, be my friend,

If I may hope for truth or friendship more !

LAMBERTI.

Believe that truth and friendship dwell in me !

Erminia, I will serve thee as I serve

My patron saint ! I swear by all my hopes

Hereafter —

ERMINIA.

Cease ! Even thus false Guido swore !

But Heaven records the perjury ! As he

Dared call its sacred witness to his words,

So will it witness them to his o'erthrow !

LAMBERTI.

Heaven's strength is in my arm t' avenge thy wrong !

ERMINIA.

But an hour since I was a very woman ;

I never dreamed misfortune could reach me ;

Love reigned within my untried heart, and life,

Swept by his wing, seemed an unfading spring.

The scene is changed. Young Love has fled away ;

His smiling eyes no longer light my soul ;

But anger, shame, and fierce revenge now dwell

Where he abode. O faithless Buondelmonti !
 Strong as my fervent love is now my hate ;
 The lion in the toils knows not more fury
 Than she whom late thy slightest wish could lead.
 O shame ! O shame ! Would that Vesuvius
 Had burst upon my head, ere I had lived
 To suffer such disgrace ! My father, too, —
 O gracious Heaven, let not this cruel blow
 Cut short his honored days !

LAMBERTI.

Calm thee, Erminia !

Even for your father's sake you must repress
 The passions which contend within your heart.

ERMINIA.

Calm ! calm ! Lamberti ? — But why should I seek,
 With such vain lamentations, to express
 Unutterable woe ? I will be stern !
 Away all woman's graces from my face, —
 All smiles, all tenderness ! I will unsex
 My injured heart, and on my brow I 'll stamp
 Such lines of fierce resolve as warriors wear
 When they rush forth to battle.

(Enter LEONORA.)

LEONORA.

O my friend,

Haste ! haste ! Thy father dies ! His grief and rage
 Have racked his feeble frame —

ERMINIA.

My father dies ?

For my disgrace he dies, and yet I live ! [Exit.

LEONORA.

Lamberti, follow us. O, woful day !

[Exit.

SCENE III.

*A chamber. AMIDEI discovered on a couch. LEONORA, LAMBERTI,
and UBERTI around him.*

AMIDEI.

My breath is fleeting fast. O that false Count !
 'T is he has slain me ! Eighty years I 've lived
 In honor, and had thought so to have died ;
 But Time, who so long spared me, now demands
 Too dear a price for his long grant of years, —
 Even my honor, which my nerveless arm
 No longer can defend.

(Enter ERMINIA.)

ERMINIA.

Father, dear father,

But live, and all is well !

AMIDEI.

Too late ! My child,
 With my last breath take my last legacy, —
 The charge to prosecute my just revenge.

Look to it, girl, as thou wouldst have me rest
In my last dwelling ; swear thou wilt not fail
Nor falter in the task ! Let not my kin
Forget to cleanse the honor of my race
In the deceiver's blood ; swear, as thou lov'st
My blessing, and dost dread a father's curse !

ERMINIA.

Ah ! dare I trust myself ?

AMIDEI.

So cold, so blind ?
Dost thou deny a dying father's wish ?
Think'st thou my soul can rest ? Think'st thou thy life
Can pass in peace the while my murderer stalks
Unpunished through the world ? Swear, or receive
My endless curse !

ERMINIA.

Father, I yield, I swear !
Forgive, forgive me, for I am distraught !

AMIDEI.

Well mayst thou be, poor child, whose every hope
One day hath blasted ! Ah ! dark shadows close
Around my eyes ; I lose thee from my sight ;
Draw near, yet nearer ; take my last embrace
And blessing ! Kinsmen, be ye true to her !
Adieu. All 's cold ; all 's dark. Death, death, thy hand
Is on me. Mercy ! — Heaven ! — Erminia,
Forget not —

[Dies.]

ERMINIA.

Father, stay ! My only friend
For ever gone ! O Death, be merciful,
And take a wretch who in one hour has proved
An age of misery !

LAMBERTI.

O, Leonora,
Urge her to quit this scene !

ERMINIA.

No, leave me all.
Here let me weep away my life, for here
All joy in it has vanished. Father ! O,
Am I indeed alone, or do I dream
That thou hast left me ? Dread reality !
Wretched Erminia, death indeed is here !

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *A room in the Amidei palace.* ERMINIA and
LEONORA *discovered.*

ERMINIA.

STILL weeping, Leonora ? Thou mayst weep ;
I neither can nor may.

LEONORA.

Tears would relieve
Thy aching heart.

ERMINIA.

My lamentation 's made.
Affection's cries break not th' eternal sleep ;
Her tears melt not the icy heart of death.
Then wherefore should I mourn ?

LEONORA.

I never dreamed
Till now how false and fatal man could be.
O, should Uberty prove so ——

ERMINIA.

Thou wouldst droop,

And, like the tender dove, mourn out thy life
For thy lost mate ; whilst I pay scorn for scorn.

LEONORA.

Ah, much I fear it hath no healing power !
Thy hand is fevered, and thine eye still wild.
The leech requested, when you were more calm,
I should admit him. Say, have I your leave ?

ERMINIA.

For what ? That he may search in my weak wrist
For the strong malady within my heart ?

LEONORA.

He would but minister a composing draught.

ERMINIA.

To torture me with drugs ! I 'll none of them !
Perchance he knows already the vile cause
Of this day's misery, and with prying eyes
Would see how Amidei's daughter bears
Her deep disgrace !

LEONORA.

O, think it not, dear friend !

Let me entreat thee rest thy wearied frame,
And lose these racking memories in sleep.

ERMINIA.

O, never shall my disenchanted eyes
Be closed again in love's delusive dream !
Last night I stood, with my full happiness
Too visibly imprinted on my brow,
Amidst a crowd, whose every murmur breathed

Of love and praise ; — to-day a mark for sneers,
And envious, gaping wonder ! I 'm no saint,
To sit and weep beneath such ignominy.
Alas ! alas ! I know not what I am,
While yet that traitor lives, — while his false tongue
Can boast my fondness, and betray with mocks
The faltering words won by his specious vows,
As witnesses of sacred love and faith,
Breathed but to him and Heaven ! I shall go mad !
Haste ! call Lamberti !

(*Erit LEONORA.*)

Well might he contemn
The fool who could not prize his peerless worth,
And, when she might have mated with the eagle,
Bestowed her heart upon a flutterer
But fit to sport from flower to flower, and wing
In search of novelty his reckless flight.
My weakness is my punishment ; my heart,
Bewildered by excess of love, has played
The sorcerer with my brain, displaying all things,
Not as they were, but as I fain would have them.
Yet, cousin, now I have awaked, thou 'lt find
My disenthralled soul can soar as high
In honor's daring flight as can thine own.

(*Enter LAMBERTI.*)

Welcome, Lamberti ; thou alone canst fling
One ray of light upon my gloom : I sent
To thee for hope.

LAMBERTI.

Thy summons met my wish.

Our kinsmen, fired with generous rage and shame,
Shake off the sloth of peace, and shout "Revenge
For Amidei's wrongs!"

ERMINIA.

I breathe again!

LAMBERTI.

This night the heads of many noble houses,
Allies by friendship some, and some by blood,
Assemble to confer upon this insult.
Erminia, I bade them meet me here,
For there are those of Amidei's blood
Who urge cold arguments of policy
Against the plea of honor; that their tameness
Should not infect our cause I call them here, —
Here, where thy father's corse, in mute appeal,
Joins with thy living agonies to rouse
The knightly ardor of each breast. Wilt thou,
Should I esteem it needful, nerve thyself
T' attend this council?

ERMINIA.

Will I keep my oath
To Heaven, the honored dead, and my own wrongs?
Show me the trial which I will not meet
Unshrinkingly! Thou dost not know me, cousin.
Last eve, 'midst pomp and revelry, these lords
Thronged round the happy child and chosen bride;

To-night, abandoned, crushed, and fatherless,
 Thou shalt behold me sue to them (if chance
 They need the spur of my complaint), nor cease
 My prayers until they swear to cleanse with blood
 The violated honor of their race.

LAMBERTI.

Most wronged of maids, let them be true or false
 To thy racked heart and to thy murdered sire
 (For Buondelmonti's treachery, though not
 His very hand, hastened the work of death),
 My hand and sword, my fortune and my life,
 Are pledged to thy dear service. Rate me as
 Thy bond-slave, living but to do thy will.
 To me existence offers but one charm, —
 T' avenge thy wrongs. Would that my heart's best
 blood

Might have averted thy deep sufferings !
 It had been freely given in such a cause.

ERMINIA.

O my best cousin ! faith and pure devotion
 Yet live in thee, and soften my despair.
 I cannot thank thee ; what would words avail
 In the conflicting passions that distract
 My bursting heart ? Yet am I grateful.

LAMBERTI.

Nay,

I am most honored that Erminia deems
 My services of worth. So fare thee well ;

For twilight ushers in the gloom of night,
And with the night our friends.

[*Exit LAMBERTI*]

ERMINIA.

Farewell, farewell,
Thou with whom fate so strangely links me ! thou
Whose fondest hopes I crushed ! Now on thy word
And will my all of earthly hope depends,
Thou greatly generous ! O, why is truth
A gem so rare, when earth without its light
Becomes a hell ? Last night methought that light
Had found its home in Buondelmonti's eyes,
Whence its pure rays, like angel-messengers,
Brought to my tranced soul such gleams of joy,
Earth was forgotten, and immortal bliss
Seemed half-revealed to me. Must I believe
That this was falsehood's treacherous glare ? — believe
Those eyes of love seek other eyes than mine
For answering raptures ? — that the lips which breathed,
So few hours since, from mine the virgin kiss
Of love and faith are now — My heart is fire !
Each thought a torturing fiend ! My senses reel
Beneath th' accursed vision ! O, for madness
To cloud it from my soul ! — It will not be ;
Yet, yet must I endure. Let me return
To the pale dead for strength and calmness ; chill
My throbbing pulses on his icy breast ;
So wait my evening's torture. Father, I come ! [Exit

SCENE II.

A hall hung with black. Enter LAMBERTI and UBERTI, meeting.

UBERTI.

WELL met, my friend. How fares Erminia ?

LAMBERTI.

Alas ! so young in stern affliction's school,
Assailed at once by such unequalled horrors,
'T is wonder that she lives : and yet she holds
A queenly dignity in her despair.
I dared not linger near her, for such tears
As she repressed sprang to my aching eyes,
Seeing the stifled pangs of one so dear,
Fatally dear to me.

UBERTI.

Thy constancy

It is that 's fatal.

LAMBERTI.

Say not, think not so !
Speak no light word of holy Constancy, —
A golden halo round the brow of Time ;
The smile of Heaven upon the love of earth ;
The flame that purifies all low desires,
And crowns the mortal with immortal bliss.
It is my life of life ! Endymion
Ne'er turned his eyes with ardor more sublime

Towards the gracious Queen of Night, than I
Towards Erminia, my saint on earth.

UBERTI.

And hath Costanza more resplendent charms
To tempt Count Guido's change ?

LAMBERTI.

Varying and vain,

He may so deem, and glory in his guilt.
Trust me, though like a meteor she may glow
Along a summer sky, her brilliancy
Is just as fleeting as the meteor's glare ;
A thing of vanity, caprice, and art,
Her false smiles snare our sex, and thus to her
Our dear Erminia's peace is offered up.
O, never was more barbarous sacrifice
Made to a more unholy deity !

(Enter L. AMIDEI and MANELLI.)

L. AMIDEI.

How sadly this funereal gloom contrasts
With last night's revelry ! Is this the hall
Where late the song, the dance, the joyous laugh,
Lent to Time's wings fresh speed ? Heart-rending
change !
These woful draperies rudely usurp
The place where fragrant flowers and dazzling lights
Charmed every eye, and in stern silence show
The reign of mirth is o'er.

LAMBERTI.

Manelli here ?

I much mistook you, sir, and deemed you 'd be
The last to join our solemn conference.
Your pardon for the thought ; believe me, friend,
In such a cause I 'm glad to be in the wrong.

MANELLI.

'T is not the spot that one would wish to seek.
These trappings quite infect me with their gloom.

UBERTI.

Shall we not dye them of a brighter hue ?

MANELLI.

Aha, Uberti ! will you ever jest ?

UBERTI.

So dull ? This looks not well. (*Aside.*) Blood, blood,
I mean.

MANELLI.

Ah ! this gallant is fierce. I forebode mischief.
How fares our pretty kinswoman.

LAMBERTI.

But ill.

MANELLI.

Ay, Amidei was a doting father.
When do we celebrate his obsequies ?

LAMBERTI.

Not till we 've read his dying testament.

(*Enter MALESPINI, with gentlemen of his house.*)

L. AMIDEI.

The Malespini ! Welcome, Signors, all !

MALESPINI.

Thanks, Amidei. We must now salute you
Chief of your honorable house.

L. AMIDEI.

Not yet.

Let me defer the rank, so sadly gained,
Till the last honors are bestowed on him
From whom I take it. Trust me, I am not
So avaricious of my kinsman's station,
As grasp it ere he lies within the tomb.

(Enter FIFANTI, attended.)

LAMBERTI.

Welcome Fifanti ! Is your heart with us ?

FIFANTI.

My heart and sword.

LAMBERTI.

I hoped no less from you.

MANELLI (to MALESPINI).

A word with you, Signor. These youths, I see,
Are bent on mischief —

[*Aside.*

LAMBERTI.

Friends, be seated all.

He who last night so blithely welcomed you
No longer can repeat his courteous greeting ;
Yet in his service are you here, and I,
As being to his love and to his blood
So near, for his sake bid you welcome.

FIFANTI.

If aught you have in charge to us from him,
We 'll gladly hear it. Am I right, Signors ?

ALL.

Surely.

LAMBERTI.

He named me not his orator,
Knowing me readier far, if there were wrong,
To right it with my hand, than prank it out
With eloquence of speech. Each one of us,
I trust, bears in each drop of noble blood
That warms his veins a ceaseless advocate
In honor's cause.

MALESPINI.

Manelli, hear'st thou that ?
He 's coming roundly to the point.

[*Aside.*]

LAMBERTI.

You know
How near the insult cast upon our friend
Touches ourselves.

MANELLI.

We understand your wish ;
Yet pause ere you involve the city's peace
In deadly feud. The rights of Holy Church
Have been assailed ; doubt not the Papal power
Will give us justice when our wrong 's made known.

LAMBERTI.

O Malespini, canst thou counsel thus ?

Sure thou art gifted with a saintly patience !
 Why, loud-voiced Rumor, with her hundred tongues,
 Will echo our disgrace from land to land ;
 Our foes will say, " Since Florence grows so tame,
 Well may we hope to crush her boasted strength " ;
 And every wretch who sinks beneath contempt
 Shall be called " Florentine."

MALESPINI.

Your sneers, my lord,
 Affect us not. For Amidei's sake
 You claim to speak ; since first his voice was raised
 In council, he has urged to amity
 By word and deed.

UBERTI.

Not purchased by disgrace !
 The honor of his house was to his age
 The treasure most esteemed, and the first blow
 Aimed at that jewel crushed the feeble spark
 Which time still spared.

LAMBERTI.

Uberti, hearken here.

[*Whispers.* *Exit* UBERTI

FIFANTI.

For me, I blush that ever Florentine
 Should need to be urged on t' avenge his friend.
 What ! is there some infection in the air
 That chills your blood thus ? for I cannot think
 This is your natural mood. O good Manelli,

Lay by this mail of caution ; it is cumbrous.

MANELLI.

So hot-brained youth may deem it ; I have tried
And proved its worth in many a stormy hour.

L. AMIDEI.

O, I am sick of such a wordy strife !
Would that some foe were thundering at our gates !
It would be seen then who had most regard
For our good city's safety ; those whose care
Would keep their bright swords bloodless, lest they rust,
Or they who are alive to honor's laws
And love the clash of steel !

(*Reënter UBERTI, leading ERMINIA.*)

MANELLI.

Erminia here !

What may this mean ?

ERMINIA.

Cousin, do not rebuke
My presence, though unwelcome. I 'm not wont
To overstep my sex's privilege ;
Yet fain would I revive my sinking heart
By your bold counsels.

MANELLI.

Noble kinswoman,
We sorrow with you in your heavy loss,
And if bold counsels could restore the dead
We would not fail you. Let us therefore hope
You come to help us curb the headstrong rashness,

Which would add wrong to wrong.

ERMINIA.

Have I not sworn

That from his sacred memory this disgrace
Should be effaced with blood ? Within my soul
There is a strength that would o'erthrow a world,
Rather than vengeance should elude my grasp !

MANELLI.

Fair cousin, this is frenzy.

ERMINIA.

Would it were !

And yet my reason tells me but one sun
Hath risen and set, since, in this very hall,
There stood a maid beset with flatterers ;
By power, rank, wealth, and love adorned, she was
A glittering mark for moths to flutter round.
Quenched are those lights which cast their splendor o'er
me !

My noble lover false ! My father dead !
Am I that same Erminia ? Are you they
Who yesterday were proud to do me homage ?

FIFANTI.

Sweet lady, heed them not, for we are sworn
To uphold thy cause, despite their coldness.

ERMINIA.

Thanks !

I know ye true, but still I must lament
That in so many here the noble blood

Is quite dried up by warm prosperity,
 Or lies so stagnant, that 't is mantled o'er
 With such a scum of cowardice and caution
 As sickens the beholder. You, Signor,

[*To one of the MALESPINI.*]

It was who swore, while sun and moon and stars
 Held on their course, you were my faithful servant.
 'T is some few hours since I have looked abroad ;
 I know not how the planets may have moved ;
 But, as I dare not to impeach your honor,
 I must believe that all the hosts of heaven
 Have wandered from their spheres. I 'd rather think
 Such portents were abroad, than doubt your word.

GENTLEMAN.

Lady, you do me right ; my sword is yours.

OTHERS.

And mine ! And mine !

ERMINIA.

O gentlemen, all thanks !

MANELLI.

You cannot dream the dangers you invoke !

ERMINIA.

My dreams are of dishonor. O, if they
 Who poison in the earth the healthful springs
 Of life-bestowing moisture, that each wretch
 Who drinks must fall a bloated, loathsome corse, —
 If they must stand accursed, what merits he
 Who taints the heart's pure springs, — whose venom glides

Unseen, yet deadly, through each quivering nerve ?
 O'er every sense dark clouds of horror roll,
 And pleasure, peace, and hope at once expire !
 Aghast the shivering soul beholds her doom ;
 The past is agony, the future dread ;
 The present living death ! I am a wretch
 So racked, so blasted — O, the lowest fiends
 May revel in their ceaseless flames, and shout,
 That earth holds one more tortured far than they !
 This lord or I must fall. Resolve !

LAMBERTI.

We are resolved.

Submission to this wrong were endless shame.
 Blood, only blood, can cleanse the scornful outrage.
 Alone would I maintain this cause, but here
 Good knights and true array themselves with me.

MALESPINI.

These transports wrong us much : we 're true as those
 Who noise their friendship by the clash of swords.
 We would reflect, ere haste to sow dissension —

L. AMIDEI.

Dissension has been sown, is grown, and ripened,
 And we would have it reaped.

MANELLI.

Yet pause : no house
 So powerful in Florence as this lord's ;
 None counts allies so numerous and so strong.
 This is no question of a private vengeance,

Or private feud ; the peace of Florence hangs
On your decision ; the first blow you aim
Looses the horrors of intestine war
Upon our state.

LAMBERTI.

This insult unredressed,
We all become a mark for scorn. Who knows
Where next the shaft of discord may alight ?
Look to yourselves, my lords, — ye who invite
Contempt, — and see your household sanctity
Invaded, and your daughters' peace a jest !
Beware of such an end !

L. AMIDEI.

Will ye unite
In fair Erminia's cause, or give your swords
To this false knight, and turn their hostile points
Against your kinsmen ? — for full well ye know
There is no neutral course. Choose, choose, my lords !

GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSES OF MALESPINI AND MANELLI.

Our choice is made ! Our hearts and swords are pledged
To Amidei and Erminia !

ERMINIA.

O gentlemen, all thanks ! Now can I hie
Back to the chamber of the honored dead,
Resume my mournful watch, calm in the faith
That reparation waits his sacred shade.
Farewell ! the saints watch over ye !

[*Exit* ERMINIA.]

ALL.

Farewell !

MANELLI.

Ah, 't is a grievous plight ! but, since the deed
Is now resolved, I would to Heaven 't were done.

LAMBERTI.

They who would see an enterprise concluded
Must first commence it.

FIFANTI.

When shall ours commence ?

L. AMIDEI.

To-morrow 's Easter-day. Here meet we then,
To pay our hapless kinsman the last dues
Earth claims from earth. Then will we name the hour
Of our revenge. Till then, Signors, adieu !

[Exeunt severally.]

ACT V.

SCENE I. *The chapel.* ERMINIA, LEONORA, LAMBERTI,
L. AMIDEI, FIFANTI, and UBERTI *discovered.*

ERMINIA.

'T is finished ! From my eyes for ever hid
Is my sole earthly friend ! I am alone !
Dear father, never more thy voice of love
Shall welcome me each morn to happy days !
No more when night returns wilt thou pronounce
Thy sacred blessing on Erminia's head !
O had I never loved but thee, my sire,
Thou hadst not left me thus ! I am chastised
In thy deep loss, for seeking happiness
Beyond a parent's pure devotion, and
For sharing with another the fond heart
Whose every thought should have been only thine !

LEONORA.

Dear, dear Erminia, give thy sorrows rest !
Peace is with him thou mournest ; on that thought
Repose thy harassed soul. Thou art unjust
For grieving o'er thy father ; thou forgett'st

That from a brighter sphere he still regards thee,
Freed from the weight of dull mortality.

ERMINIA.

O what has grief to do with reason ? They
Are stubborn foes, and cannot dwell together ;
For grief in her strong frenzy brooks no rival,
And rudely overthrows calm reason's seat,
And reigns alone. O mock me not with reason,
But aid me to lament, and lend me tears,
For there is such a fire within my brain
As doth forbid my aching eyes to find
Relief in weeping ! O, I know no hope
Save in grim Death, and he is treacherous,
And answers not my call !

LEONORA.

I 'll weep with thee,
And for thee, hapless friend !

ERMINIA.

Oceans of tears
Could not allay my anguish ! Memory
Will not be drowned till life is swept away
By time's devouring flood !

LAMBERTI.

Look on thy friends ;
Nor vex their tenderness with thy wild grief.
Could thy sire's accents penetrate the cloud
Which screens the immortal from the mortal world,
Would he not bid thee, even for his love,
Forego thy mournful plaint ?

ERMINIA.

O, no ! O, no !

He would not be so treacherous to himself.
O, no ! He bids me haste to him and hide
My grief and shame in his protecting arms.
He doth reproach me, that I still can live,
When he, who gave me life, hath died for me.
Ah, never can I cease to call on death,
Till the grim tyrant, wearied with my cries,
Shall rid him of my importunity
By chaining me within my father's tomb !

LEONORA.

O, rave no more, Erminia !

ERMINIA.

Call me not

By that name longer ; for Erminia was
All love, all joy, all pride, and happiness,
All trusting fondness and unwavering faith !
But in my heart a host of fiends have risen ;
Shame, wrath, revenge, despair, — infernal tempters, —
With scorpion stings destroy each gentler guest.

UBERTI.

Be it our care to soothe thy pangs. Believe
That hope again shall dawn for thee, and chase
Far from thy heart these perilous griefs. Have pa-
tience !
For here stand thy avengers, — thine to death.
We four are chosen by our partisans

To immolate the foe, whose perfidy
Hath made thee fatherless.

ERMINIA.

O treacherous Guido ! [*Faints.*]

LEONORA.

Aid me ! Erminia dies ! Lamberti, help !

LAMBERTI.

Wait for me, friends, while to her couch I bear
This lovely victim. Such a sight must make
The angels lend their voices to our cause !

[*Ereunt* LAMBERTI, LEONORA, and ERMINIA.]

FIFANTI.

My sword already rattles in its sheath,
Impatient to avenge her.

L. AMIDEI.

Guido's blood
Will cleanse the stain from Amidei's shield ;
But what shall heal the crushed and bleeding heart
Of the betrayed ? She seems no more like one
Whose home is earth ; but ere her spirit mounts
To the bright realms of peace, his howling soul
Shall find its guerdon in the realms below !

FIFANTI.

When shall we forth ?

UBERTI.

Lamberti has the charge
To choose the hour and place of retribution.

(*Reënter* LAMBERTI.)

LAMBERTI.

To-day, if ever, let our vengeance burst,
Heavy and sure, upon the offender's head.
To-day, I learn, he thinks to cross the bridge,
And pass this house. The blinded traitor dreams,
Perchance, that heaven and earth forget his crime.

UBERTI.

O, never must he see these portals more !
Never must his insulting glance be raised
Towards these walls, whose very stones cry out
Against his guilt ! Ere he hath crossed the bridge
He dies ! Beneath the statue of fierce Mars
We will assail him : with his forfeit life
Our shame shall vanish !

LAMBERTI.

And the perjurer's blood
Rush, a libation to the ruthless Mars,
Beneath whose frown he falls. O, may the reign
Of falsehood ever be as short as his !
Ye are prepared, my friends ?

L. AMIDEI.

We are. Lead on.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

A chamber. ERMINIA discovered alone.

ERMINIA.

I SEEM awakening from a fearful dream ;
My brain 's benumbed ; a dim, oppressive sense
Of evil clouds my thoughts. Where have I been ?
What horrors seen and heard ? Let me recall
The past again ; for since the fatal hour
When to my startled ear, like a death-trump,
Came Guido's perfidy, passion hath burst
From reason's guiding hand. What have I done,
What said, what sworn, in my insensate course ?
How blindly sought to quench the fires of pride
And jealousy's hot stings with cold disdain
And unrelenting vengeance ! Bootless strife !
Mine is no Fury's heart. The smothered strength
Of love revives ! And I have sought his death
Who was my life ! O, were it not a crime,
I should say *is*, — and yet but little crime,
For little span of life remains to me !
False though he be, what power condemns my truth ?
O, let me bear that with me to the tomb,
Sole treasure of my early blighted hopes ;
And rather let me die in gentle sorrow,
Than live the cherisher of unholy rage !

O, welcome, heavenly light, whose dawn illumines
My wayward course ! best comforter, thy rays
Have banished my despair ; for innocence
May hope that Time's consoling hand will bring
Peace upon earth, and point to rest in heaven ;
But where, O, where shall guilt repose ? where hide
When conscience wakes ? O, happier the betrayed
Than the betrayer ! Yet I sought his life, —
Death's seal on my own brow, within my heart
His rankling arrow ! And although 't was aimed
By Guido's hand, th' almighty summoner
Must first have given the mandate. Must I go
With blood upon my soul ? Have mercy, Heaven !
Father, my oath hangs heavy on my heart !
O Virgin Mother, counsel me ! Which way
Shall I undo what I have done ? restrain
The passions I have spurred ? What said Uberti
Of my avengers ? Ah, perhaps even now
They are about this deed ! Is there no help ?
Yes, I will fly to save ! — Alas, I shrink ! —
O woman's pride, where art thou ? In the dust
Bow thy repentant head ! Away, away,
All mean regards ! Shall mortal weakness stand
'Twixt me and Heaven ? Here, Leonora, haste !

(Enter LEONORA.)

LEONORA.

What would my friend ?

ERMINIA.

Where are those gentlemen ?

BUONDELMONTI.

Know you his illness ?

ROSSI.

Rage and shame, my lord,

At your defection.

BUONDELMONTI.

Peace ! it could not be !

Yet he was old, and loved his daughter well.

I 'll order masses at Saint Stephen's church

For his repose. Methinks his obsequies

Are strangely hurried. But what dusky forms

Are now emerging from the palace ? Look !

ROSSI.

Doubtless his kinsmen and our foes. Should they

Espy us here, they will not spare us.

BUONDELMONTI.

Pshaw !

Too long we loiter. Let us on, my friend.

ROSSI.

Past Amidei's mansion ?

BUONDELMONTI.

Wherefore not ?

ROSSI.

Nothing ; save that upon this day 't were best

To avoid a quarrel.

BUONDELMONTI.

I neither seek nor shun it.

'T is theirs to choose ; theirs be the shame. We 'll see

SCENE III.

A bridge upon the Arno. At one extremity a statue of Mars.

Enter BRONDELMONTE and ROSS.

BRONDELMONTE.

SEE ! we approach my former love's abode.
Think'st thou she weeps for me ?

ROSS.

My lord, she weeps

A truer friend ; to-day the funeral rites
Are paid to Amidei.

BRONDELMONTE.

Paid to whom ?

ROSS.

Her father.

BRONDELMONTE.

He was well but yesterday.

ROSS.

Thou shouldst know well as my lord hath chimed
Short time effects ; 't was yesterday he died.

BRONDELMONTE.

And why have I not heard it ?

ROSS.

'T was not well

To cloud your bridal day with news of death.

Draw, villain ! draw ! and, if thou canst, defend
Thy worthless life !

BUONDELMONTI.

Villain to me, Lamberti !
Methinks thou 'rt zealous to avenge the maid
Whose smiles you vainly sought. Perhaps they 'll prove
The promised guerdon of thy chivalry.

LAMBERTI.

Base railler, draw ! I would not murder thee.
The hangman's hands were fitter far to end
Thy hated life than honorable steel.

[*They fight, and BUONDELMONTI falls.*]

BUONDELMONTI.

My punishment is just ! Erminia's wrongs
Required this retribution. Ah, she comes
To triumph in her vengeance ! Haste thee, death,
Lest her eye give a wound far more severe
Than her avenger's sword.

[*Dies.*]

(*Enter ERMINIA and LEONORA.*)

ERMINIA.

O Heaven ! too late !

(*Enter the WIDOW DONATI and COSTANZA.*)

WIDOW.

What bloody scene is here ?

COSTANZA.

My husband ! — slain !

LAMBERTI.

Thy husband, siren ! Ay, thine even in death !

For ye must meet in those dire realms below,
Where perfidy receives its hideous doom.
Gaze on the triumph of thy vanity !
For this shall Florence curse thy memory
Through years of furious war.

WIDOW.

O, let thy tongue
Curse me alone ! but tenfold curses rest
Upon thy murderous hand ——

LAMBERTI.

Vain woman, peace !
Erminia, let me lead thee hence ; thou seest
Thy wrongs effaced. Come ! Heavens, thou faintest !

ERMINIA.

No !

LAMBERTI.

Let me support thee ; come !

ERMINIA.

I cannot hence ! —
Not yet. Let me behold his face once more !
My father, frown not on me ! Thou 'rt obeyed,
E'en to the brink of everlasting woe !
And now away each vain disguise ! Away,
Thou demon, pride, that in thy serpent folds
Wouldst crush my heart ! Come pity, scorn, disgrace,
I brave ye all ! Here, where I should have lived,
Here let me die ! Guido, return, return !
Thou hear'st not, seest not, know'st not my despair.

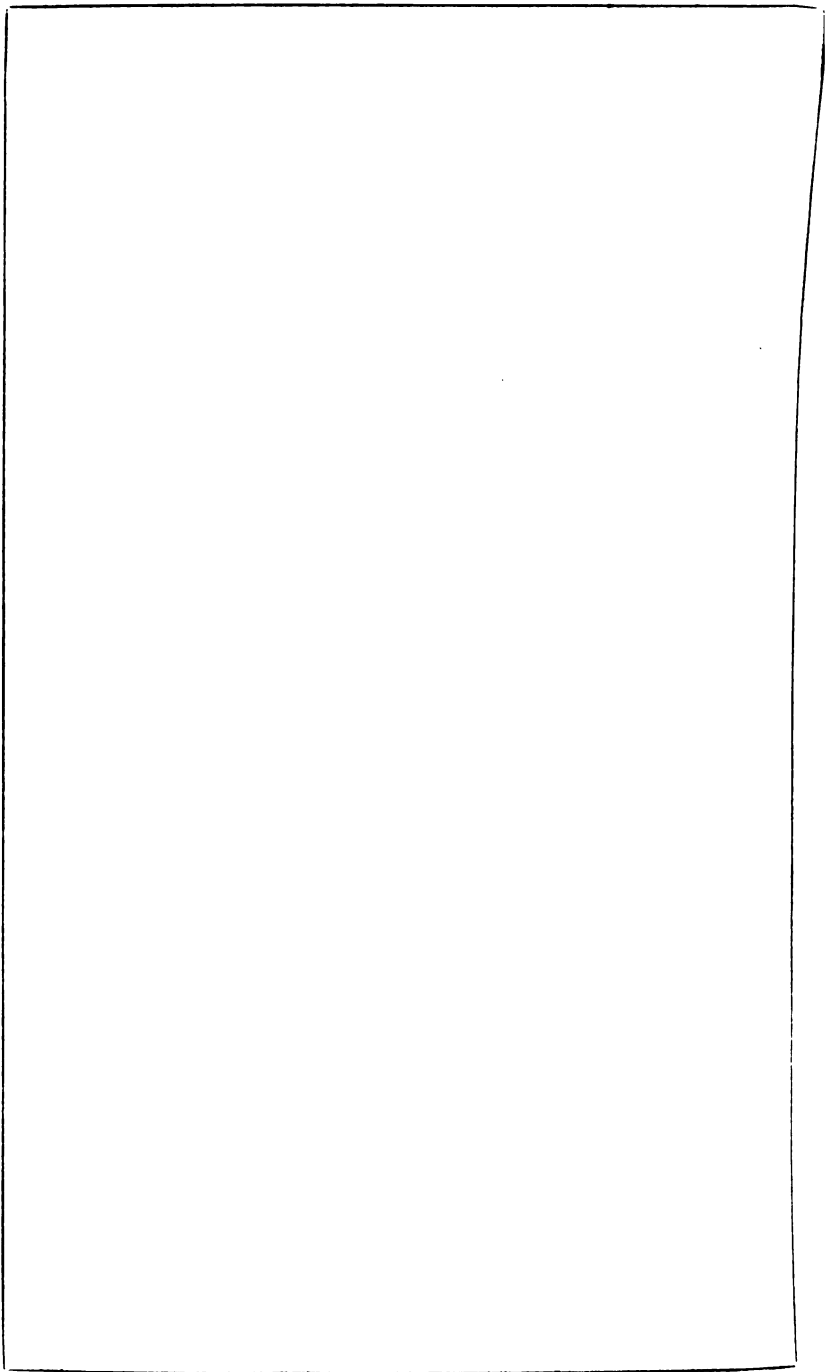
But Heaven is merciful ! My veins are chilled,
My limbs benumbed to marble ! On my lip
I feel death's icy breath, — O, breath of paradise
To my sick heart ! All things below fade from me, —
But there — above — Stay, Guido, stay ! I come !

[Dies.]

LAMBERTI.

Most loved and most deplored of Tuscan maids,
Ne'er shall the heavy cause of so much woe
Sink to oblivion, but late happy Florence
With tears of blood commemorate thy doom !

THE NEW WORLD.

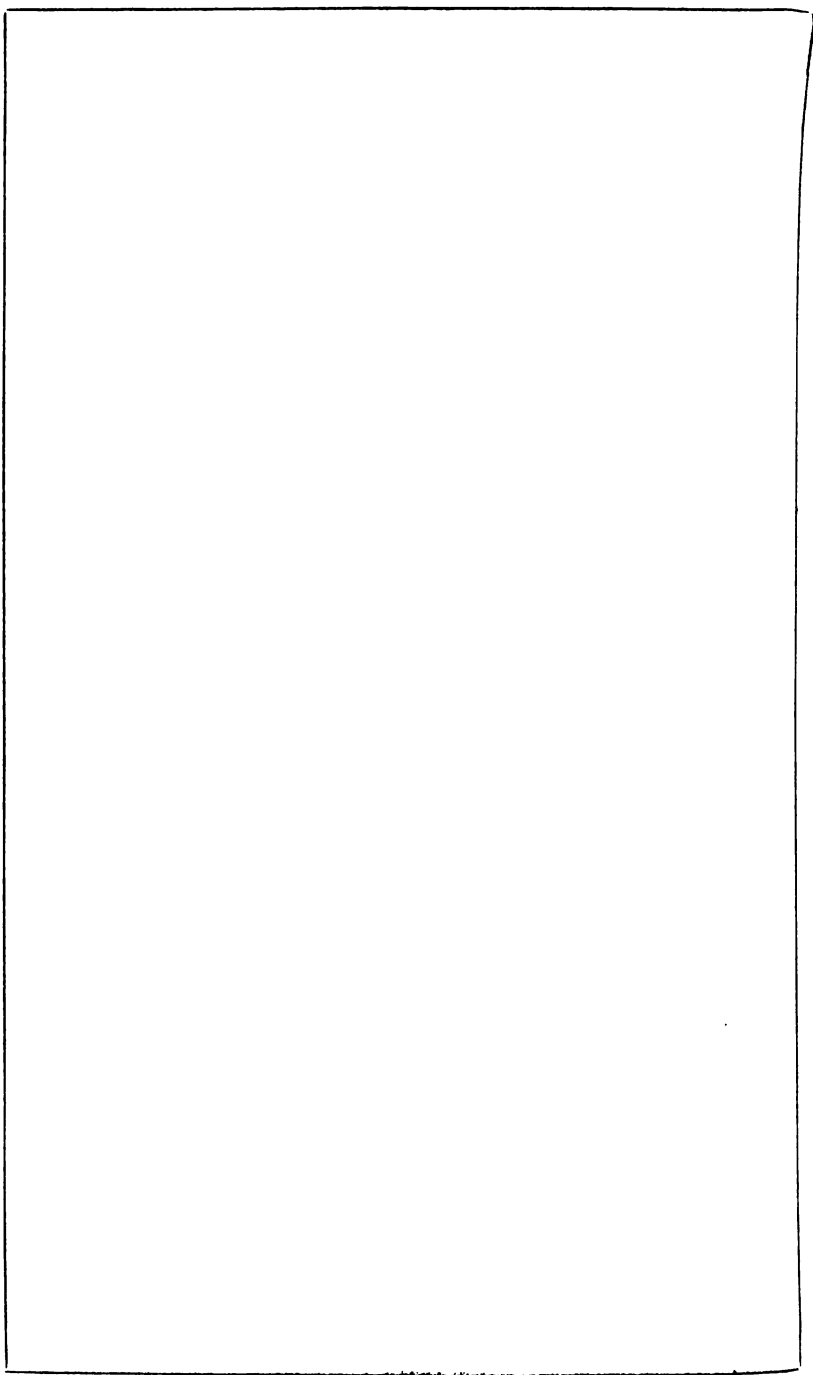


DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

HERNANDO DE GUEVARA,	. . .	<i>A young Spanish Noble.</i>
FRANCISCO ROLDAN,	. . .	{ <i>Chief Judge of the Island of Hayti, or Española.</i>
ADRIAN DE MOXICA,	}	
DIEGO DE ESCOBAR,		. . . <i>Adherents of Roldan.</i>
PEDRO REGUELME,		
BEHECHIO,		
ANACAONA,	<i>Sister to Behechio.</i>
ALANA,	<i>Her Daughter.</i>

Train of Xaraguan Maidens. Spaniards. Indians.

The SCENE is in the Province of Xaragua, in the Island of Hayti.



THE NEW WORLD.

ACT I.

SCENE I. *A grove before ROLDAN'S dwelling. ROLDAN, DE ESCOBAR, DE MEXICA, REGUELME, and other Spaniards.*

ROLDAN.

At length, my friends, our triumph is complete !
In yielding we are conquerors ! Colon
No longer dares oppress the sons of Spain,
But, awed by our resistance to his sway,
Resigns his hope t' enslave us. Here behold
The treaty which our firmness has obtained !
The Admiral empowers me to resume
My office of chief judge ; restores my lands ;
Grants me extensive tracts within this province,
With slaves to till the soil. For you, my friends,
Whose loyal aid enabled me to hold
The viceroy thus at bay, I have required
As just conditions ; — liberal grants of land,
And, 'stead of tribute from the native chiefs,
It is arranged that parties of their subjects,
At stated times, shall aid to cultivate

The soil allotted to you. On these terms
We are agreed to lay aside our arms,
And rest content beneath the viceroy's rule.

REGUELME.

Noble Alcalde, let us here repeat
Our former vows of fealty ! To you
We owe our freedom ! When the Admiral,
Departing for Spain's shores, gave to his brothers,
Without authority from Ferdinand,
The government of Hayti, you it was
Descried the bonds they wished to rivet on us,
And roused us to resistance. Led by you
We still have triumphed. Here let each renew
Thanks for the past ! Let all here bend the knee,
Tendering their vows of future faith ! Alcalde,
Receive my homage ! [All kneel.]

ROLDAN.

Thanks, my noble friends !
Roldan is not ungrateful, and by deeds
Would show his sense of favor. I appoint
Reguelme the Alcalde of Bonao.

REGUELME.

Alcalde, you overwhelm me by thus adding
New benefits to those before conferred.
Your gifts make me your slave.

ROLDAN.

My valued friend :
Ever remain so. For you, Escobar,

And De Moxica, and all others here
To whom I owe support, the Admiral
Has portioned out your lands within this province ;
No lovelier spot on earth has e'er been found ;
None worthier to be the soldier's home.
Here will we rest us from the toils of war,
Secure from care ; here all is peace and joy.
Nature with lavish hand bestows her gifts ;
Let us enjoy them, and forget the world
That lies beyond these valleys.

ALL.

Live Roldan !

His will is ours !

ROLDAN.

My friends, your generous faith
Is dearer far than all the glittering wealth
This Western world can give. If tyranny
Should dare again uprear her serpent head,
Roldan is yours to crush again the foe.
Will 't please you now retire ? Ere long we 'll meet
For further council. You, De Escobar,
Remain with me.

(Exeunt all but DE ESCOBAR.)

Confess, De Escobar,
That this rebellion is a thriving trade !

ESCOBAR.

It has proved so with us ; thanks to the times,
And to our leader ! Were the first less rough,

The second less determined, and less skilled
In all those arts that win the populace,
We should have rued the attempt. Still, though success
Has crowned our enterprise, you have not reached
The prize at which you grasped, — the government.

ROLDAN.

But I am well content. Know, Don Diego,
That in Xaragua I have found a prize
Worth all the spoils of Hayti !

ESCOBAR.

Ah ! a mine ?

ROLDAN.

A young, fair girl.

ESCOBAR.

Ambition yields to love !

ROLDAN.

Reserve your smiles till you have seen the maid,
For, by my patron saint, such matchless charms
The Old World never saw !

ESCOBAR.

Who is this wonder ?

ROLDAN.

Anacaona's daughter, young Alana,
Whose sire, the proud cacique, Caonabo,
Died of a broken heart, when, as a captive,
He voyaged late to Spain.

ESCOBAR.

You think to win

This Western flower ? Perchance her vows are given
To some young chieftain of her native isle.

ROLDAN.

Her heart is free as are the sun's bright rays,
And shall ere long be mine ! — But see, who comes ?
Behechio, the cacique.

(Enter BEHECHIO.)

Welcome, prince !

What happy chance directs your steps this way ?

BEHECHIO.

One of my tribe brings news, that not far hence,
Within the valley, a young Spaniard waits,
Who seeks your friend Don Adrian, or yourself.

ROLDAN.

A stranger, chieftain, or one of my band ?

BEHECHIO.

My people know him not.

ROLDAN.

Thanks, chieftain, thanks,
For your prompt warning ! I will hasten forth,
Though now I 've little dread of foes. Perchance
This stranger is some envoy from Columbus.
If such, he shall be welcomed with due state.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

A different part of the valley. GUEVARA discovered alone.

GUEVARA.

So, this is banishment ! — to be condemned
To dwell awhile in paradise ! It proves
That chastisement is sometimes love. The ship
In which I should have sailed for Spain is gone,
And here, thanks to my sentence, I can rest,
Until I 'm wearied e'en of happiness.
This clime was formed for bliss ! Where'er I turn,
New beauties meet my eye. Granada's plains,
So rich in nature's charms that legends say
The Moorish heaven hangs over them, must yield
In splendor to Xaragua's vales. But hark !

[Drums and trumpets heard.]

What martial sound breaks on the slumbering air ?
Trumpets' and drums' rude notes dispel the charm
Which made me quite forget that this sweet grove,
With all its beauty, was of earth. I see
A numerous train, with all the pomp of war,
Move slowly on. Is this to honor me ?
Or rages discord 'mid these blooming scenes ?
Near and more near they come ; I now descry
Their leader's waving plume and glittering spear ;
How beautiful the sight, as on they march,

Beneath the verdant boughs of those huge trees !
 My pulses bound anew with knightly ardor !
 Fled are th' effeminate dreams of ease, in which
 These soft, luxurious scenes ensnared my soul !
 Now, now I feel what folly 't was to brave
 Columbus' wrath, and so blot out my name
 From the immortal roll on which the world,
 In future days, shall read the glorious deeds
 Of those who gave to light these Western shores.
 The die is cast ! I 'm less than nothing here :
 So let me haste to Spain, and once again
 Stand forth among her chivalry, nor dream,
 In base, inglorious ease, my life away !
 Castile ! Castile ! O, would that I were there !

*(Enter ROLDAN, DE ESCOBAR, DE MOXICA, REGUELME, and
 a numerous train of Spaniards.)*

DE MOXICA *(advancing to GUEVARA)*.

Hernando !

GUEVARA.

Adrian !

[They embrace.]

DE MOXICA.

Most welcome, cousin !

ROLDAN.

Most welcome to Xaragua, Don Hernando !

De Escobar, Reguelme, — all my friends

Are known to you, I think.

REGUELME.

Welcome, my friend ! What tidings do you bring

From the city and the Admiral ?

DE ESCOBAR.

Most welcome, Don Hernando ! Would you see
How well rebellion prospers in this province,
That you have left the viceroy's retinue,
To grace Xaragua with your presence ?

GUEVARA.

Knights,

I thank your courtesy ; but let me ask,
Why you approach me with an armed train ?
Methinks, to greet a friend and countryman
No war array was needed !

DE ESCOBAR.

It was meant

That your reception should be framed to suit
The rank you hold. I pray you let us know
What title may be yours, — if you are termed
The viceroy's spy or his ambassador ?

DE MOXICA.

De Escobar, this insult to my friend —

DE ESCOBAR.

May be avenged, if he can wield a sword !

ROLDAN.

Back ! back ! This quarrel 's idle ! What ! so soon
Wearied of peace that you would slay your friends !
De Escobar, what means this insolence ?
It should have been for me to ask the cause
That brings Guevara here. Señor, I pray you,

Excuse this rudeness ! 'T is so short a time
Since it was needful to maintain strict watch,
That we still deem each visitor a foe
Until we know his purpose.

GUEVARA.

No excuse,
Señor, is needed. I have learned, ere this,
That pardoned rebels still dread punishment ;
Still by their perfidy judge others' faith.
Believe me, this reception moves me not,
Or moves me but to laughter, that one knight
Should cause commotion in your numerous train.

ROLDAN.

Are you an envoy of the viceroy ?

GUEVARA.

No.

I am a banished man, and ordered here
But to embark for Spain.

DE MOXICA.

How ? banished, cousin ?

How has Columbus dared assume such sway
Over a high-born Spanish cavalier ?

GUEVARA.

It matters not ; the viceroy disapproved
My conduct, and dismissed me from his suite.
Arriving here, I found the fleet had sailed,
So thought to task your hospitality.

ROLDAN.

'T is freely given for your own sake, Señor,
And for your cousin's. Rest with us, I pray,
Until you 're weary of this Western world,
And pine for Spain.

GUEVARA.

Thanks for your courtesy !

But on these shores I may not long remain.
I cannot rest inactive ; here, the field
Of knightly enterprise is closed to me.
Spain must again receive me on her soil ;
My sword need not rust there.

DE ESCOBAR.

There speaks Castile !

Guevara, in all honorable frankness,
I pray your pardon for my rash suspicions !
While I esteemed you of Columbus' train,
My heart was closed against you. I was wrong.
So there 's my hand.

GUEVARA.

And mine.

ROLDAN (*to GUEVARA*).

The Indian drum !

Behechio, cacique of this province,
Comes with his followers to welcome you.

(*Enter BEHECHIO, followed by a number of his tribe.*)

BEHECHIO.

Roldan, I haste to offer to your friend

The welcome, which it is my will and duty,
As chieftain of this province, to extend
To every stranger.

ROLDAN.

Hospitality

Dwells ever with Behechio. Behold
My countryman, Hernando de Guevara,
Who fain would see the paradise of Hayti
Ere he returns to Spain, his native land.

BEHECHIO.

Young stranger, you are welcome to Xaragua.
If you have sought it with no ill intent,
I trust you may find pleasure in its vales.
All they contain are yours while you remain
Behechio's guest ; their fragrant flowers and fruits,
The dwellers of the lake, of earth, and air,
Are at your service ; so Behechio wills it.
If your designs are evil, may the God
Who rules us both preserve this peaceful land
And happy people from your influence !

GUEVARA.

I thank your kindness, chieftain ; and, believe me,
No evil wishes lurk within my breast
Against your people ; may they long remain
Peaceful and happy ! In Xaragua
I 'm but a passing guest. A few short days
Will see me pillowed on the ocean's breast,
Wooing your Western gales to waft me hence,

Towards my natives shores. Those shores, indeed,
'Are far less peaceful and less beautiful
Than thine own groves ; but, O, they 're far more dear !

ROLDAN.

Lo, where approach Xaragua's fair, to greet
The arrival of the stranger !

*(Enter a long train of Indian maidens, with ALANA at their
head, bearing in their hands palm-branches.)*

Look, my friend,
Upon these island beauties, and decide
Between them and the vaunted dames of Spain.
*(ALANA moves aside, the other maidens kneel and place the palms
at GUEVARA's feet.)*

MAIDENS.

Welcome, O stranger, to Xaragua's plains !

ROLDAN.

And see, the fair Anacaona comes,
Moving in state ; Behechio's sister she,
And widow of the chieftain Caonabo.
Among her tribe she 's honored as a queen.
Pay her due reverence, she is worthy of it !

[Aside to GUEVARA.]

(Enter ANACAONA, escorted by Indian maidens and warriors.)

ROLDAN.

Princess, let me present my worthy friend,
The cavalier Hernando de Guevara.

ANACAONA.

The cavalier is welcome to my home ;

Anacaona is the Spaniard's friend.

GUEVARA.

Princess, my people own your constant kindness,
And are most grateful. For myself, I feel
Much honored by a welcome so distinguished.
I am a simple Spanish cavalier,
Without authority upon your shores,
And had no right to hope that such reception
Would wait me from the princes of the land !

ANACAONA.

Think not, O youth, that to the great alone
We haste to offer hospitality ;
The name of stranger claims its sacred rites.

DE ESCOBAR.

Which is your island goddess ? [Aside to ROLDAN.

ROLDAN.

She who stands

Apart, and silently surveys the scene.
De Escobar, mark with what native grace
And dignity she 's stamped ! Not such the mien
With which our high-born dames of Spain are seen !
In them art faintly mocks the noble air
Which nature here bestows without constraint. [Aside.

BEHECHIO.

Roldan, the feast awaits us ; with your friends
Haste to partake it.

ROLDAN.

Chief, we follow you. [Exeunt.

ACT II.

SCENE I. *A grove, with a fountain in its centre. ANACAONA'S dwelling in the background. BEHECHIO and ANACAONA.*

BEHECHIO.

ANOTHER Spaniard ! Thus each day, each hour,
Brings on these locusts of that far world ! Soon
All Hayti will be theirs, and we their slaves !
Cursed be the light that to their longing eyes
Displayed these shores ! Cursed be the favoring winds
Which bore their winged canoes across the waves,
Nor rent each beam asunder !

ANACAONA.

Brother, why
This sudden rage ? What is 't disturbs thee thus ?

BEHECHIO.

O, blinded to thy fate ! What dost thou ask ?
Seest thou not day by day these Spaniards wrest
Our freedom from us, yet canst coldly ask,
What is 't disturbs thee ?

ANACAONA.

Is there some new wrong ?

In yon fair-spoken Spaniard hast thou found
A hidden foe ?

BEHECHIO.

'T is not on one, but all,
'That my thoughts turn. How short a time has passed
Since he whom in their foreign tongue they term
Adelantado, brother to Colon,
Entered our province with a warlike train,
And asked and offered friendship ! Mark the end !
His followers return, — their avarice
And love of ease incited by these vales,
Where Nature's hand provides with lavish care
For Nature's children. Quickly they report
The beauties of Xaragua, and, behold !
Ere long Roldan and his rebellious band
Take refuge here from justice.

ANACAONA.

You received
And welcomed them.

BEHECHIO.

'True. Think'st thou that I cared
When these oppressive strangers left their prey,
To turn and rend each other ? My word was pledged
T' afford my friendship to all Spaniards, nor
Had I the power, whatever were my will,
To guard my province from intrusion.

ANACAONA.

But

Why are you now thus roused ? Nor by Roldan,
Nor by his band, have we been wronged, and now
They 're yielded to their chief, and are content
To cease their strife.

BEHECHIO.

And turn their restless fury
Again upon our people ! O my country !
Once free and happy, how art thou declining !

ANACAONA.

Behechio, why thus afflict yourself ?
Why ever dwell upon the gloomiest side
Of our affairs ? Reflect how much more wise
These strangers are than we ; — how wonderful
Their knowledge seems to us ! Compare their ships,
Which dare the angry waves, to our canoes ;
Compare the dwellings which they raise with ours ;
Note well their dress, — th' impenetrable garb
Which bids defiance to the bow and spear !
Behold their weapons too, — alas, how deadly !
A thousand, thousand things at once display
Our ignorance and their skill. 'T is by the last
They conquer us. Then let us rather seek
To win from them the wisdom which is power,
Than risk unequal strife. O mighty race ! ——

BEHECHIO.

And mightiest still in vice !

ANACAONA.

O, say not so !

Behold Columbus and his warlike brother !

BEHECHIO.

Ay, they are good and great, — as Spaniards may be ;
No avarice inspires them ; — yet their hands
Are stained with Haytien blood !

ANACAONA.

Not willingly
They shed it, but, alas ! in self-defence ;
They were the aggrieved.

BEHECHIO.

Woman, rememberest thou
Thy husband, the proud Carib, Caonabo ?
Whose hands placed fetters on his free-born limbs ?
Who tore him from his home, his wife, his child,
And bore him in their ships far from the land
Dear to his soul ? He died, Anacaona !
His eagle eye gazed madly on the bonds
Which Spanish craft threw round him, and he died !
Not on the battle-field, where his strong arm
Was ever first ; not 'mid his faithful tribe
Did he depart ; but far on unknown waves
His spirit fainted, and his proud form drooped ;
'T was there he died, — died of a broken heart !

ANACAONA.

Behechio, spare, O, spare me !

BEHECHIO.

Spare thee ? No !
Listen, while I recount the mighty deeds

Of Spanish friends ! Hast thou forgotten yet
The day, the fatal day, when down they rushed
On Caonabo's brother, who had called
His tribe to avenge their chieftain's loss ? Then, then,
Burst the loud thunder and the brilliant flash
Forth from the echoing forest, and thy friends,
Like autumn leaves, were strewn upon the plain.
Soon on their giant coursers came the foe
Forth from their covert ; lance, and spear, and sword
Drank Haytien blood, and o'er the prostrate forms
Of Hayti's sons careered the horses ; then
They loosed the furious bloodhound on thy friends,
Which, not more savage than their Spanish lords,
Sprang at the throats, tore out the quivering hearts ——

ANACAONA.

Cease ! I entreat thee, cease ! Must I endure
Again the tortures of that scene of woe ?
Had Caonabo listened to my words
He still had lived and reigned. Too well I saw
That 'gainst the weapons of the Spanish band
No Haytien could stand, and counselled peace.
My words were vain, and vain are now my tears.
But, O Behechio, be ruled by me !
Thy vales are fruitful, and thy tribe at peace ;
The Spaniards are thy friends ; O, let no rashness
Destroy this peace, and desolate thy land !

BEHECHIO.

The warning is not needed. No vain hopes

Shall lead me to embroil my hapless tribe
In useless strife. No ; though their doom must come,
Let me not haste it ! May I never live
To see my people's misery ! to see
Their hopeless ruin ! for the day is near
When all their joys must end ; when slavery
And labor harsh shall chase the dance and song
Of the cool evening hours ! O, never more
Shall liberty and ease resume their reign !
Sorrow, and toil, and care, the conqueror's sword,
Will do their work, and our unhappy race
Must vanish fast beneath them ! — But I see
Alana comes this way. Let us retire,
Nor darken with our griefs her sunny smiles. *[Exit.]*

(Enter ALANA.)

ALANA.

How my heart beats ! I thought some one pursued,
And, turning, caught the gleam of mail, then fled.
No one appears, so here I will repose,
And dream of days before these strangers came
To fill our valleys with the noise of war.
Hark ! hear I not a step ? No ; all is still.
I feared it was Roldan who followed me,
To fill my ear with tedious words of love.
To-day I like him less than yesterday ;
Yet know not why, for he 's the same as then ;
Perhaps I 'm changed ; — but I 'll not think of him.
I 'll throw myself beside this sparkling fount,

List to its gentle murmurs, and inhale
The breeze that sports amid this verdant grove.

[Seats herself by the fountain, and gazes into it.]

*(GUEVARA enters gently behind and bends over her ; she sees his face
reflected in the water, and starts up with a faint shriek.)*

GUEVARA.

Fair wood-nymph, fly me not ! If I am bold
In entering thy retreat, thy charms will plead
Most eloquently my excuse !

ALANA.

Señor,
Xaraguan maids ask not the stranger's homage ;
They are content to charm Xaraguan youths,
Whose hearts know no deceit.

GUEVARA.

So young, so fair,
And yet so stern ! Say, maiden, why you fled
When late I sought to stay your passing steps.

ALANA.

I thought — I feared —

GUEVARA.

Am I so terrible ?

ALANA.

I feared it was Roldan who followed me.

GUEVARA.

Ha ! here is rivalry ! *(Aside.)* Then I may hope
You did not fly from me ?

ALANA.

I thought not of you.

GUEVARA.

That answer might beseem a court coquette ! [*Aside.*
Maiden, I have a sister, young like you,
Who mourns my absence from my father's home,
With no kind friend to smile away my cares,
Or share my sorrows ; could that sister think
That in this Western land there was a maid,
Young, fair, and gentle, who 'd compassionate
Her brother's lonely fate, what gratitude
Would move her tender breast ! She could not think
That Western maids would spurn the stranger's heart.

ALANA.

Nay, judge us not so harshly ; we but fear
His flattery.

GUEVARA.

Can Western lovers gaze
On beauty's cheek, nor let the heart's emotion
Burst forth from lip and eye ? Ah, not so calm
Our Spanish youths ! With them 't is Beauty's glance
That prompts to deeds of glory, Beauty's smile
That well repays all peril. Tell them not
In Beauty's presence to repress their rapture,
Nor let their lips proclaim their soul's devotion.
Vain is the wish to bar love's privilege.
Thus do they kneel, and pay the homage due,
And plead, as now I plead, for Beauty's favor.

ALANA.

How can I answer you ? I dare not think

Your words are more than sport. I pray you, know
That Western hearts, though not less soft and true
Than those of other climes, yet do not yield
To those who seek them but in idleness,
Nor prize the love they win. Stranger, 't is said
That Spanish youths, although with many vows
They bind themselves, know naught of constancy,
But each fair maid in turn adore, and pledge
Their broken faith anew.

GUEVARA.

Let not thy heart
Harbour suspicion. 'T is the foulest guest
That ever clouded the sweet sympathies
Of youthful maiden's breast. In sober truth,
I love thee, fair Alana ; for my love
Grant me some little hope to win thy heart.

ALANA.

Alas, I fear that 't is already won ! [*Aside.*
I cannot say — I must begone ; I hear
A stranger's footsteps. [*She hurries into the cottage.*

GUEVARA.

Like a timid fawn
She bounds away, but bears within her breast
The subtle dart of love. How beautiful !
The untamed daughter of the wilderness !
May it be mine to bear this graceful flower
To other climes, and show the proud Old World
That the chief treasure of these Western shores

Lies not in gold or gems, but woman's charms !

(Enter DE ESCOBAR.)

DE ESCOBAR.

I joy to see that in this calm retreat
Time hangs not heavily upon your hands.
You miss not, then, the viceroy's mimic court ?

GUEVARA.

That had its pleasures, yet I mourn them not.
Here Nature is omnipotent, and I
Am at her shrine a fervent worshipper.

DE ESCOBAR.

Worship not too devoutly at the shrine
Of Nature's children.

GUEVARA.

Escobar, your meaning —

DE ESCOBAR.

Is plain and friendly. But a moment since
You parted from Alana.

GUEVARA.

He who dares
To play the spy upon me is my foe.

DE ESCOBAR.

You are too hasty. I am not your foe,
But warn you for your safety. Know, Roldan
Is fixed to wed this island maiden.

GUEVARA.

Ay ?

Deem'st thou Roldan so dreadful, that his name

Can fright me from my will ? De Escobar,
I am content that he should be my rival ;
And when he will, our weapons shall decide
Who best deserves to win this Haytien maid.

DE ESCOBAR.

Truce with your folly ! Think you he will yield
To such decision his so-cherished prize ?
Reflect that he is powerful, and you
Without support ; why, then, provoke his wrath ?

GUEVARA.

His wrath may serve to fright the simple Indian ;
The belted knight but scorns so poor a threat.
Say to Roldan that 't will be seen, ere long,
Which bears the best blade and most winning tongue.

[*Exit.*

DE ESCOBAR.

Go, foolish boy, rush headlong on your fate !
Buy with your life an Indian maiden's smile !
You have been warned, and I can do no more.

[*Exit.*

ACT III.

SCENE I. *In ANACAONA's cottage.* ROLDAN, BEHECHIO,
and ANACAONA.

ROLDAN.

You, princess, you, Behechio, know my wish
To wed Alana. Though I cannot woo
In flattering phrase, trust me, you could not yield
The maid to one whose love is more sincere.

ANACAONA.

Win, then, her own consent, and she is thine.

ROLDAN.

Have I your favor, chief?

BEHECHIO.

I am well pleased
The maiden should wed one whose arm is strong
To shield her from the woes which I foresee
Must overwhelm our isle.

ROLDAN.

Then summon her.

(ANACAONA retires, and reappears with ALANA.)

BEHECHIO.

Now may her mother's wit have taught her how

This Spaniard must be answered ! Much I fear
Her will from prudence will receive no council ! [*Aside.*]

ROLDAN.

You know my love, Alana ; a blunt soldier
Abhors delays, nor can with patience wait
The thousand changes of the female heart.
I pray you, therefore, say at once you 're mine.

ALANA.

Spare me awhile, Roldan ! I cannot wed !
My heart is happier in its native freedom !

ROLDAN.

Such vain excuses maidens ever make.
Bestow on me that gentle, fluttering heart.
I have no wish to enslave it. Sure my own,
Which you 've possessed so long, may be esteemed
Sufficient hostage. Speak !

ALANA.

Not now ! not now ! —
How my head swims ! — O mother, speak for me !

ROLDAN.

Maiden, this trifling I 've endured too long !
Bethink you that my heart, though rude, perchance,
Has softened to your charms, and been full long
The slave of your caprice ; that heart has rights
As well as yours, nor must they be denied.
I pray you to be candid. I would know
If you can be my bride. Still no reply ?
Perhaps among my followers you 've found

Some knight more worthy to possess your love ;
One whose more courtly grace and courtly words
Eclipse so plain a wooer as myself !

[ALANA bursts into tears and throws herself into her mother's arms.

ROLDAN walks about as if perplexed ; then kneels to ALANA.

Forgive me, loved one, if I seem too harsh !
Think that my happiness is in your power,
And pardon my impatience ! Ah, those tears
Reproach me more than words !

ANACAONA.

Urge her no more !

Go now, nor doubt my influence in your favor.

ROLDAN.

Thanks, princess ! I obey. Much I suspect
Some other claims an interest in her heart.
Who dares to rival me may dare oppose
The hurricane's fell wrath ! Farewell awhile.
Chieftain, a word with you.

[Exeunt ROLDAN and BEHECHIO.

ANACAONA.

Whence are these passionate tears ? Why do you weep
As if your heart must break ? What hidden grief
O'erwhelms you thus ? Confide your sorrows to me.
Can you not love Roldan ?

ALANA.

Love him ! No, no !

ANACAONA.

And is he so abhorred ? You were not wont

To name him in such tones. You have done wrong
To listen to his passion, if you felt
Such hatred to him.

ALANA.

O, rebuke me not,
Unless you 're merciless as he !

ANACAONA.

My child,
Thy present misery is rebuke enough
For any fault thy inexperienced youth
Has led thee to commit. Yet can it be
That hatred to Roldan is the sole cause
Of all these bitter tears ? Answer, my child ;
Is there no other reason ? Ah, that start !
Then he was right ! Who is the rival ? Who
Has won this heart that beats so wildly ? Speak !

ALANA.

I dare not say. Roldan's last words still ring
Upon my ear with most foreboding sound.
Ah, woe is me !

ANACAONA.

Heed not his threats. Not all
His arrogance shall win thee from me
Should you consent ——

ALANA.

O, never !

ANACAONA.

So resolved ?

This favored one, is he of thine own race ?
A Spaniard, then ? — Don Adrian ? — Not so ? —
Guevara ? — Thy emotion answers. Nay,
Weep not anew ; Guevara 's formed to win !
His person, grace, and eloquence of speech
Might well subdue a heart more hard than thine.

ALANA.

Would we had never met ! Alas, I dread
Roldan's stern wrath !

ANACAONA.

What shouldst thou fear from him ?

ALANA.

I think not of myself ; but, ah, my mother,
Roldan's fierce jealousy will never rest
Until he learns who rivals him ! Alas,
Death gleamed from his stern eye when he retired !

ANACAONA.

These terrors ill become a chieftain's daughter.
They live but in thy fancy. Come with me ;
Subdue thy tears, and banish all thy cares.
We will consult Behechio, and his judgment
Shall guide us safely through this present trouble.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

Before ROLDAN's dwelling. DE ESCOBAR and DE MOXICA.

DE MOXICA.

My friend, you 're in the Alcalde's confidence ;
How speeds his wooing with the Haytien maid ?

DE ESCOBAR.

I know he loves her, but I know no more.
Why do you ask ?

DE MOXICA.

Because, a moment since,
I saw Behechio and Roldan together ;
Slowly they walked, and earnestly conferred.
The chieftain's brow was clouded, and Roldan's
Was black as blackest night ; as they were near
Anacaona's cottage, and full oft
Directed there their gestures, I inferred
That her fair daughter occupied their thoughts.

DE ESCOBAR.

'T is possible. Roldan himself draws near ;
If you are anxious, question him, I pray ; —
And get his dagger through you for your pains. [Aside.

(DE MOXICA draws back as ROLDAN enters.)

ROLDAN.

A curse on woman's fickleness ! A curse

On my own folly, when I weakly thought
That in this Western world the sex were free
From the caprice which governs them elsewhere !

[Perceives DE MOXICA.]

Ha ! De Moxica ! Eavesdropping ! Begone !
Have I no privacy ?

(DE MOXICA *withdraws with a menacing gesture.*)

De Escobar,

I trust your friendship ! You must aid my wrath !

DE ESCOBAR.

Command me as you will.

ROLDAN.

Must I repeat

My weakness and my shame ? Well, listen then !
When first Alana's beauty caught my eye,
And with such words as lovers use I wooed her,
She ne'er repulsed my suit, but calmly heard,
Like one whose heart was free. From this I hoped
That time and my devotion might create
An answering flame. But when, scarce an hour since,
Sure of my prize, I offered her my hand,
In presence of her mother and Behechio,
She answered with evasions, sighs, and tears,
Nor could my prayers or threats gain further notice.
'T is plain I have a rival ; who he is
I know not ; to discover him, my friend,
I ask your aid.

DE ESCOBAR.

Guevara is the man.

ROLDAN.

Ah, it is possible ! May the foul fiend,
Who sent him hither, rend me limb from limb,
If I allow him to bear off my prize !
What shall be done to rid me of this youth
Who dares to rival me in love ?

DE ESCOBAR.

I know not.

ROLDAN.

No hesitation ! Quick ! devise some plan,

Or ——— *[Laying his hand on his dagger.]*

DE ESCOBAR.

Must it come to that ? Not so, Roldan ;
Banish him, if you will, but harm him not.

ROLDAN.

Banish him ? Where ? To Isabella, whence
Colon has driven him ?

DE ESCOBAR.

'T were a jest to see
The Admiral's proud form dilate with wrath
At such presumption in the pardoned rebel !

ROLDAN.

Jest not, De Escobar ! By all the saints,
This foolish girl 's so seated in my heart,
That if I would I could not tear her thence !
Your counsel ! Quick, or it may come too late !

DE ESCOBAR.

This is no scene for fiery conference.
Restrain thy wrathful mood. We will devise
Some fitting means. Enter ; we 'll talk within.
[They go into the house.

SCENE III.

*Before ANACAONA'S cottage. ALANA discovered, seated by the
fountain. Enter GUEVARA.*

GUEVARA.

HERE dwells my island goddess ! May she be,
As heretofore, propitious to my vows !
Ah, yonder she reclines beside the fount,
Like Venus gazing on her parent wave !
She weeps ! On earth who can hope happiness,
When youth and innocence are prey to sorrow ?
Alana, my beloved, whence are those tears ?

ALANA.

Fly from me, youth ! Ah, fly ! Avoid my presence !
Danger and death lurk near me !

GUEVARA.

True, my love.

There 's danger in those eyes, whose radiant glance
Has pierced my heart. There 's danger in each grace
Thy youthful form displays. I own thy power,
And yield myself thy captive.

ALANA.

Cease, Guevara,
Nor linger here ! Even now the fierce Roldan
Swears horrid vengeance 'gainst thee.

GUEVARA.

This confirms

The warning of De Escobar, and now,
Whilst the fair maid trembles 'twixt love and fear,
I 'll wile the sweet confession from her lips. [Aside.
Roldan may threaten as he will ; while here
I offer up my homage, thou alone
Fillest all my thoughts.

ALANA.

Guevara, O, forbear,
Nor brave the Alcalde's wrath ! Should he appear,
Thy life would pay the forfeit of thy rashness.

GUEVARA.

Whence is his sudden fury against me,
To whom, so 'short time since, he was a stranger ?

ALANA.

I am the wretched cause.

GUEVARA.

Thou, fair one ? Thou ?
Can he expect to bar all eyes save his
From gazing on thy beauty, and all hearts
From paying thee allegiance ?

ALANA.

Ah ! he fears, —

He thinks he has a rival, though as yet
He knows not whom. Ah, shun his jealous wrath !

GUEVARA.

Jealous indeed ! If he possess that heart,
Why should he rage against the hapless knight
Who dares but gaze on thee, without a hope
To win the treasure from him ?

ALANA.

Well he knows
My heart was never his, and now he fears
That 't is bestowed elsewhere.

GUEVARA.

O, let me hope
I have some share in it ! Turn not away,
But listen to my suit. Say, by what vows
Shall I convince thee of my truth ? To doubt
Were cruelty. Behold, this crystal fount
Shall in its glassy mirror bear such witness
To my sincerity, as must remove
Each shadow of a fear. See thine own charms !
Who can gaze on them and not be subdued ?
Ah, yield thee, fair one ! Why shouldst thou deny
To own, that, though a conqueror, thou canst pity
The pangs thou dost inflict ? Give me the heart
Which, trembling, flies Roldan's unknightly wooing !
Thou yieldest, gentle one ! Thy trembling hand
Assures my happiness ; ah, let thy lips
Pronounce me blest, and thus confirm my rapture !

Guevara is removed by banishment,
The game is yours again.

ROLDAN.

You counsel well ;
But yet, such is my hatred to that youth
That I should think my vengeance cheaply bought,
Even at the price of life.

[*Exeunt* ROLDAN and DE ESCOBAR.]

REGUELME (*to* GUEVARA).

Explain this scene, my friend. The Indian maid,
Who led us hither, said not how you roused
The sleeping tiger in the Alcalde's breast.
Revenge was in his eye.

GUEVARA.

I 've done Roldan
The injury which man can least forgive, —
I 've won from him the maiden of his love.

REGUELME.

Look to your life, then, friend ! He 's not the man
That will forget a wrong. You cannot know
The deep-laid craft, untiring perseverance,
And desperate boldness of his character.
'T is my advice that you should quit the province ;
You 'll not be safe till then.

GUEVARA.

And leave my prize
To the Alcalde ? No, not so, my friend.
Guevara never fled from man. Roldan

May practise 'gainst my life, but to his craft
I will oppose due caution ; open war
I 'll knightlike meet !

REGUELME.

Then be it as you will.
But when you find your foes too many for you,
Command my aid.

DE MOXICA.

To mine you have the right
Of friendship and of blood.

GUEVARA.

Thanks to you both !

[*Exeunt REGUELME and DE MOXICA.*

(*Reënter ROLDAN.*)

ROLDAN.

A word with you, Señor.

GUEVARA (*laying his hand on his sword*).

Ah !

ROLDAN.

No ; not so.

I meet you not upon such terms. Attend.
Within this province I am as a king ;
The natives honor me ; a numerous band
Of trusty followers attends my steps,
To hear and execute my will ; Colon,
'Mid all his sounding rank and mockery
Of princely state, even he had not the power
To oppose me. Wherefore shouldst thou hope, young
man,

To brave me in my strength, and bear away
This Haytien maiden from my watchful care ?

GUEVARA.

Roldan, what right claim'st thou to wed this maid,
Despite her own refusal of thy hand ?

ROLDAN.

The right of power.

GUEVARA.

Ay, true ! The unknighly taunt
Suits well the plebeian lips that uttered it !
But canst thou be so base as to refuse
To leave to our good swords the arbitrament
Of this dispute ?

ROLDAN.

Why should I grant such favor ?
The arbitrament 's already in my hands.
Why should I stake upon my weapon's thrust
What is already mine ?

GUEVARA.

Why do I ask
The churlish blood that stagnates in thy veins
To flow in unison with the pure stream
That warms a noble's breast ? Why should I think
The low-born clown, who basely gained his power,
Could wield that power with honor ? Far too much
I graced thee when I crossed my sword with thine ;
For thy ignoble blood would shame the blade
Which ne'er, before that hour, was drawn 'gainst one

So far beneath the rank of gentleman.
Coward and churl alike, thy heart knows not
The throb of honor.

ROLDAN.

Coward, say'st thou, youth ?
Take back the falsehood, or ——

GUEVARA.

Or thou wilt call
Thine armed minions to avenge the scorn ?
No ! I repeat it, — Coward ! For what is he
Who dares not with his sword assert his honor ?

ROLDAN.

Dares not, thou misproud knight ! Full well thou know'st
Nor earth nor hell can show the deed I dare not !

GUEVARA.

I grant it, so 't is base.

ROLDAN.

Have I not braved
The Adelantado in his upstart course,
Thrown off his yoke, and even against Colon
Made firm resistance, till he did me right ?

GUEVARA.

O, doubly base, since, with unblushing front,
Thou canst adduce thy vile ingratitude
To prove thy claim to courage ! No, Roldan,
The courage which ennobles springs from honor.
Such courage hast thou as the venom'd snake,
Which rears its slimy crest behind its victim,

And in his heel inflicts the fatal wound.
'T was when Colon was absent that you sought
By your foul calumnies to undermine
His hard-earned fame, and to possess his power.
But you were baffled there, thanks to our queen,
Whose high Castilian blood would never give
Castilian subjects to such sway as thine !

ROLDAN.

And what, then, is Colon ? His ancestry
Can scarce claim more respect than mine.

GUEVARA.

Not so.

Who, when the sun slow rises from the east,
Asks whence it comes ? Who, when the eagle soars
On untamed pinions upward to the sky,
Asks of his birthplace ? None. Columbus stands
Alone, nor needs a brilliant ancestry.
The glorious halo which surrounds his head
Would render dim the most renowned descent ;
Nor will men look beyond that blaze of fame
To know if light or darkness dwell behind it.
Columbus never erred, save when he raised
A reptile, such as thou art, from the dust,
Where, but for him, thou wouldst have crawled for aye.

ROLDAN.

My patience vanishes ! — Yet wherefore vent
My passion to my own undoing ? He
Whose hands are tied may vent in wordy war

The rancor of his breast. Adieu, Señor ;
You 'll learn full soon what 't is to brave Roldan. [Exit.

GUEVARA.

The rebel caitiff ! Could I but arouse
One spark of knightly ardor in his breast,
Then might I hope my trusty blade would win
The maid, whom much I fear will ne'er be mine,
While he maintains such stubborn policy ;
For he has strength, and I am powerless.
Accursed fate that brought me to this isle !
Why did I leave thee, Spain ? why quit the court
Where happiness and honor bloomed around me ?
For there each knight confessed my martial skill,
Each beauteous dame smiled on me. Here Roldan,
Who in our own land never could have hoped
The honor of my notice, — he can now
Threaten a Spanish noble ! — Dread his power !
Or yield my will to his ! As if I knew
What 't was to yield ! — Not even Colon could teach
Guevara such a lesson ! Let Roldan
Look to himself ! The party which he formed
Against Columbus may be lured to turn
Against their leader. I will to the work,
And teach this upstart churl how insecure
Is ill-gained power.

(Enter DE MOXICA.)

Ah, welcome, Adrian !

DE MOXICA.

Is he who brings ill tidings welcome ?

GUEVARA.

Ah !

Ill tidings ! Trifle not, I pray you, cousin !

DE MOXICA.

You 're banished to Cahay.

GUEVARA.

Banished ! By whom ?

DE MOXICA.

By whom but our Alcalde, mighty man !

Who one day for a kingdom wages war,

The next is battling for a woman's favor.

GUEVARA.

And has he dared do this ?

DE MOXICA.

He dares do aught

That ever mortal dared. Yet this, methinks,

Is no such mighty deed ; — 't is but to oppress

One who is powerless.

GUEVARA.

I will appeal

Back to the viceroy 'gainst this flagrant wrong.

DE MOXICA.

Appeal thou to Roldan against Colon,

And there is chance that thou mayst gain thy cause.

Full well you know, that in our late rebellion,

So void of means was he to take the field,

He was content to purchase our submission

By granting full assent to all our terms.

GUEVARA.

True ; true ; I raved. What course can I pursue ?

DE MOXICA.

What course ? The course that leads you from this province.

GUEVARA.

Moxica, no ! To leave yon gentle maid,
On whom my wooing draws the Alcalde's wrath,
Were a foul blot upon my knightly fame !
But for my fatal love, she ne'er had known
Her present misery. I 've wooed and won
This lovely one ; have vowed through weal or woe
That my right arm should ever bear her up
Upon life's stormy path ; and shall I fly
From the first cloud that lowers above our heads ?
When I do this, then may my knightly crest
Be humbled in the dust, my spurs hewn off,
My spotless shield reversed !

DE MOXICA.

Hernando, hold !

Where you cannot resist, there is no shame
In yielding. By my knighthood, you must go !
There 's no alternative. And for the maid,
Your friends will see that she 's not forced to wed
The Alcalde. If she 's fickle, like her sex,
And to the present lover most inclines,
You must submit.

GUEVARA.

Roldan will force me hence ?

ALANA.

Would that they were vain !

But no, Guevara. I can read our doom
In the Alcalde's eyes. Alas, my sire,
How little didst thou think, when thy strong arm
Upheld thy much-loved child, and warlike bands
Thronged round their mighty chief, that ever woe
Would blight her youthful days ! No thought of foes
From distant lands, more powerful than thyself,
E'er crossed thy dauntless breast. But thou art gone ;
And 'mid those hills where once thy haughty eye
Glanced proudly o'er a tribe whose faithful hearts
Throbbled high to do thy will, a helpless few,
Enslaved, degraded, hide their hunted heads
And die in woe, where once they lived in power.

GUEVARA.

Her words are daggers to my breast ! E'en so
Have Spanish hands made desolate the soil,
And trampled on its free and happy sons,
And deluged Haytien earth in Haytien blood.
Would that the deep remorse which wrings my heart
Might reach each Spaniard who has raised his arm
Against this hapless race !

ALANA.

I meant not to upbraid thee, but my thoughts
With present sorrow contrast former bliss.
Thou 'rt gone, my father, and thy helpless child
Quails 'neath a Spaniard's glance. Woe for the land

Which slumbers thus beneath the oppressor's rod !
Whose men are women, and whose women call
In vain upon those men to nerve their hearts,
And die or conquer in their country's cause !

ANACAONA.

Alana, cease, nor rend thy mother's heart
With vain complaints ! Thy words renew my woes.
Past horrors rise again before my eyes.

ALANA.

Forgive me, mother ! Let thy child's embrace
Banish thy anguish !

GUEVARA.

I, alas, have helped
To widow such a mother ! I have helped
To render such a daughter fatherless !

[*Aside.*

[*Exit ANACAONA.*

ALANA (*to GUEVARA*).

Your brow is clouded, too. My rebel tongue
Hath ill expressed the feelings of my heart,
Since it offends the friends whom most I love.

GUEVARA.

No, gentle one ; each word of thine to me
Is far more dear than I can tell. 'T is I
Whom ruthless fate condemns to grieve and pain
The maid for whom I 'd die. Alana, he
Who sees with envy that I am beloved
Condemns me to depart from thy sweet presence.

ALANA.

Guevara, leave me not ! In pity, stay !
If your deep vows of love were e'er sincere,
Remain ! Protect the hapless Haytien maid,
Whose love and faith to thee have caused Roldan
To threaten direst vengeance on her head !

GUEVARA.

And did he threaten thee ? Now, by the saints,
But little hinders that I cast aside
That honor which he knows not, and despatch
The shameless ruffian with my dagger's point !
And did this chance since last we met, my love ?

ALANA.

Scarce an hour since. He vowed, whoever I loved,
I should wed none but him ; — vowed with fierce oaths
And threats against thy life.

GUEVARA.

What saidst thou then ?

ALANA.

What could I say ? I wept, which but the more
Enraged his savage heart, because my tears
Bore witness to my love.

GUEVARA.

Ah, luckless knight !

What evil star presided at my birth,
'That thus my fondest love must prove a curse ?
Alana, I must leave thee, for Roldan
Rules here with iron sway ; I have no power.

V.

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Say,

NO CROSS

The Alcalde's path are seldom safe.

ALANA.

Then go !

O, haste away, while I remain, — and die !

GUEVARA.

Despair not, dearest one ; we 'll meet again !
Ere yonder moon fulfils her destined course,
Before again her silver crescent gleams
Above these groves, Guevara will be here,
To live or die for you, as fate decrees.
Loved one, farewell !

ALANA.

Ah, stay, Guevara, stay !

GUEVARA.

What would my love ?

ALANA.

Nothing ; but yet I fear

This parting is our last.

GUEVARA.

Be firm, fair maid,
Nor heed the Alcalde's threats ! — She hears me not !
Quite overwhelmed with grief ! I will not go
And leave this gentle maid in such despair !
Come one, come all the minions of Roldan,
I will defy them all ere I 'll desert
This unprotected one ! Hear me, my love !
Thy tears have conquered ; here I will remain
While my life lasts !

DE MOXICA.

Guevara ! are you mad ?

Hear me, Alana ! If you love this knight,
Or if you value your own life, control
This passionate grief, and bid him not delay.
Fear not Roldan ; for, by my knightly faith,
You shall not be compelled to be his wife.
But if to-morrow see my kinsman here
I cannot answer for his life.

ALANA.

Ah, fly,
Nor heed my weakness ! fly, ere yet Roldan
Pours his fell vengeance on thy head !

DE MOXICA.

Ere this,
But for De Escobar, thy blood had paid
The forfeit of thy rashness.

ALANA.

Some one comes !
It is Roldan ! Ah, save me !

(Enter DE ESCOBAR.)

DE MOXICA.

Escobar !
What would you here ?

DE ESCOBAR.

Moxica, naught with you.
My errand 's with Guevara.

GUEVARA.

Well, Señor,

What would you with Guevara ?

DE ESCOBAR.

To repeat,
As a command, my former friendly warning.
'T is time you turned your back upon Xaragua.

GUEVARA.

I am aware, sir, of your *master's* will ;
It needs not repetition ; I 've no choice,
And must submit.

DE ESCOBAR.

My master, as you term him,
Like other men, uses the power he has
As best may suit his humor. Some might find
A thousand whims, which to their eyes would seem
Far worthier of pursuit than is Roldan's.
His whim is to possess this Indian maid.
My errand 's not to vindicate his will,
Nor would I quarrel with you, though I 'm bound
To enforce his orders. Trust me, Don Hernando,
That this decree, sprung from Roldan's caprice,
Is one most fitted for thy real welfare.
Haste to thy native Spain ; assume the rank
To which thy birth and talents give thee claim.
Thou art a noble youth, and pity 't is
That thou shouldst linger on these Western shores,
To lose thy life in an ignoble strife.

GUEVARA.

De Escobar, I thank you ! Your advice

Is such as I should follow, but my will
And duty are at variance. Oft you 've seen
A bark, whose rowers faintly ply the oar
Against the rushing current ; thus with me ;
Duty, like some o'erwearied oarsman, pulls
In vain towards the proper haven, while
The current, inclination, bears me on
Towards shoals and quicksands. Yet I must submit
To your commands, but pray of you the grace
To linger half an hour.

DE ESCOBAR.

I will await
That time within the vale where first we met.
An escort there attends. Meanwhile, adieu.

GUEVARA.

Adieu, Señor ; thanks for your favor.

(*Exit DE ESCOBAR.*)

Now

There but remains to say the last farewell
To thee, fair maid, whose image is enshrined
Deep in my heart ; thou 'lt have no rival there,
Though we should never meet again. Weep not,
Or you 'll unman me quite. Loved one, be firm !
I will return ; perhaps to overthrow
Thy tyrant's power. Good night, my love, good night !

[*Exeunt GUEVARA and DE MOXICA.*]

ALANA.

Evil 's our parting ; evil was the hour

When first we met and loved, but to be severed !
Each night I 'll sit and watch yon silver moon,
Which moves so brightly, free from mortal cares,
And as she slowly wanes I will rejoice
That so much nearer is my love's return ;
For when with slender horns she faintly beams
Anew along the sky, he will be here ;
Preserve me, gentle Hope, until that hour !
Then, if he come not, welcome, welcome, Death,
Rather than slavery. [Exit.

SCENE V.

The forest. Enter GUEVARA.

GUEVARA.

HERE first we met, and here we should have parted.
'T is strange this Western wood-nymph should have fixed
The heart where love had ne'er before the power
To rivet his soft bonds ! But they 're secured
Beyond my power to loosen, and methinks
I would not if I could ; they are too dear !
Yet what a sacrifice ! De Escobar
Has struck the chord which never yet refused
To answer the least touch, — ambition ! Ah,
Can I remain to waste my youth, my life,
Perchance, my hopes of high renown,
For the faint hope of conquering Roldan

And winning young Alana? Yes! In vain
Ambition holds her lures. I will be true
To her who loves so fondly and so truly;
True to myself, — for could I e'er know peace
Away from her? I love this gentle maid
As knights should ever love, with faith and ardor.
Her must I win before again I view
My native Spain; then will I haste away,
And show the Spanish court my Haytien gem, —
The dearer, that 't was won with blood and toil.

(Enter DE ESCOBAR, attended.)

DE ESCOBAR.

Guevara, you are punctual. Behold
A trusty escort. These, with due respect,
Will guide you to Cahay. And now farewell.
All joy attend you! May you ne'er behold
Xaragua's vales again! That wish should be
The wish of all who deem Guevara's honor
Of higher import than Guevara's pleasure.

GUEVARA. ✓

Farewell, De Escobar! I'll think of thee
As one well worthy of the spurs he wears.

[Exeunt severally.]

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *Before ANACAONA's cottage.* ROLDAN,
ANACAONA, and BEHECHIO.

ROLDAN.

Too long I 've humbly sued. The maid must know
That he who begs the grace he can command
Will list to no refusal.

BEHECHIO.

Spaniard, hear me !

I 've oft submitted to your tyranny
Because my people's lives were dearer to me
Than my own power ; but this last insolence
I will oppose while I have life. Our maids
May mate with Spaniards when it is their will ;
But while Xaragua's tribes call me their chief,
No daughter of Xaragua shall be forced
To wed a Spanish master.

ROLDAN.

Say'st thou so ?

And dost thou think to oppose thy will to mine ?
The maid shall be my wife.

BEHECHIO.

Her will alone

Shall govern her.

ROLDAN.

My will shall govern her,

And you ——

ANACAONA.

O, cease this discord ! What avails it ?

Roldan, content you. You shall urge your suit

To her who must decide it. Hapless child !

If from her Carib sire she had received

The Carib spirit, she were far more fit

To wrestle with her fate ! (*Approaching the cottage.*) Alana,
haste,

Come forth !

ALANA (coming from the cottage).

What would you, mother ? Ah !

[She perceives ROLDAN, and turns to retire.

ANACAONA.

Remain.

[Exeunt ANACAONA and BEHECHIO.

ROLDAN.

Alana, shun me not ; what do you fear ?

If those who love you are received thus coldly,

How would you look upon your enemies ?

This little hand declares its mistress' heart,

And trembles in my grasp as if 't were pressed

By venom'd snake. Alana, is this well ?

Why should you hate me thus ?

ALANA.

I bear no hate

To aught on earth, except my own existence.

BOLDAN.

Hate aught on earth except its brightest gem !

Hate sun, and moon, and stars, and hide their rays

'Neath thy displeasure, but shine on thyself,

The brightest star that e'er shed smiling hope

Upon a wanderer's heart, and beacons him

To shelter and to joy !

ALANA.

Alas ! alas !

A star hid 'neath dark clouds, whence jarring storms,

Thunder and lightning fierce, burst forth.

BOLDAN.

Fair maid,

Complain not of those storms, since thou hast power

To shed thy smiles, and, like the noonday sun,

Dispel all gloomy vapors from the air.

ALANA.

I once could smile. Those careless hours are fled.

BOLDAN.

Smile upon me, Alana, and that smile

Shall be to us the sign of peaceful union

Between thy race and mine.

ALANA.

Would that a smile

Were the sole pledge required !

ROLDAN.

Now aid me, saints !

For a blunt soldier's brain lacks the swift wit
To match a woman's humors. (*Aside.*) No, Alana,
Thy wish is vain. More than a smile 's required.
This is the bond which shall unite our people.

[*Takes her hand ; she withdraws it.*

Is this thy answer ? — O for some strong spell
To chain the rising dragon in my breast ! [*Aside.*
Alana, since we met thou know'st I 've stooped
To win thy favor as I would not stoop
Even to my king, though such humiliation
Would gain a crown. If I 've seemed harsh at times,
The fear to lose thee moved me to such madness.
And though of late thou hast repulsed my wooing,
It was not so when first I knelt, — when first
I told the tale which to a woman's ear
Is ne'er ungrateful.

ALANA.

True, all true, Roldan ;

But I was weak and foolish ; then my heart
Knew naught of love, — and I was wrong, — most wrong.
O, be thy wrath appeased by this abasement ! [*Kneeling.*
Forgive me, and forget me !

ROLDAN.

Maiden, rise !

Subdue these childish tremors, and be firm.

I will address thy reason, not thy heart.
Listen, Alana, and weigh well my words ;
For on thy answer hangs the fate of him
Who won the love which once I fondly hoped
Would rest on me ; and on thy answer hangs,
Perchance, thy people's fate. Dost understand ?

ALANA.

Too well !

ROLDAN.

Since Don Hernando now is banished,
No longer will his presence feed the flame
Which his false flattery raised within thy breast.

ALANA.

Roldan, of thine own cause say what thou wilt,
But think not to asperse my absent friend.

ROLDAN.

Pique but a woman's vanity, and straight
She 'll speak, though she before were spellbound. [*Aside.*
He 's gone, nor will return ; ere this the ship
Which has received him spreads her snowy sails
To catch the Western breeze, and ploughs the wave
Towards his native land.

ALANA.

It is not so !

Revoke thy words, Roldan, in charity !
Say that thou hast deceived me, — that Guevara
Is still upon the island, — and I 'll be
Your slave !

ROLDAN.

What frenzy seizes you ? Is 't strange
That this gallant, finding no longer hope
To mar my wishes, has at length obeyed
The viceroy's orders, and embarked for Spain ?

ALANA.

Thy words have wellnigh killed me ! Let thy sword
Complete the sacrifice ! If this be so,
Where shall I look for faith ? — I 'll not believe it !
He is the soul of truth ! 'T is some foul craft
Of thine, Roldan, to crush still more my heart,
And mould it to thy will. But thou shalt fail !

ROLDAN.

Hear me, Alana, —

ALANA.

Off ! I will not hear thee !

ROLDAN.

By Heaven, thou shalt both hear and answer me
In milder mood than this ! A soldier's patience
Is ever brief, and mine is of the briefest.
Tax not my mood too far, for thy weak hand
Has not the skill to rein it.

ALANA.

'T is a task

I would not seek.

ROLDAN.

Hear me ! Thou seest thy race,
Where'er they 've sought to oppose the Spanish arms,

Fall victims to their rashness, and their homes
Become the conqueror's prize. Xaragua's plains
Have yet escaped, for peace still reigns between
The Spaniards and thy tribe ; but this may vanish.
Perchance the embers now exist of discord,
And who can say how soon a blast may rise
To fan them into fury ? Know'st thou not
That oftentimes when the air is calm, the sun
Without a cloud, and nature all at peace,
Bursts forth the dread Urican, whose fell breath
Brings universal desolation ? Know
Man's passions are Uricans, deadlier far
Than those the warring elements produce.
They have swept o'er this island, but have left
One little spot of peace, — this blooming province.
Yet here they may burst forth, and strip these vales
Of all their charms. Wouldst thou avert the doom ?

ALANA.

At cost of life.

BOLDAN.

I would that thou shouldst live,
Not die for it. Behechio has resolved
He 'll not bestow thee on me, save thy will
Accompanies thy hand.

ALANA.

Ah ! said he so ?
Then there is help. O, I was most unjust
To think that he would see me sacrificed !

BOLDAN.

Each word she utters more inflames my wrath ! [Aside.
If thou art wise, be silent, and attend.
Behechio has threatened this, and I
Have sworn thou shalt be mine. Canst thou divine
How this will end ?

ALANA.

Would I could answer, No !

BOLDAN.

Behechio resists me ; thy weak race
Stand forth to oppose the Spaniards, — to oppose
Their unarmed bodies to the sword and spear
Of fatal steel ; while from the impervious mail
Their arrows fall innoxious. Say, Alana,
How must this end ?

ALANA.

O man of violence,
Destruction hangs upon thy lips, and death
And desolation seem but sport to thee !
Where must this end, you ask ? Not where you wish.
Thou know'st not, Spaniard, where it shall begin ;
For when thy hand is raised against my tribe,
I will commence the work, and in my breast
Plant the first steel that 's bared, ere clasp thy hand
Red with my people's blood.

BOLDAN.

And will thy death
Avert thy people's fate ? No ! by the saints,

If thou shouldst dare the deed thou threatst me with,
I will do one more terrible ! Thine eyes
Should rest in dying on thy noble mother,
And hundreds of thy friends in chains around her,
Writhing in tortures such as fiends invent
To aid man's vengeance. But why do I threat ?
Life is too dear to one so young and fair,
To be resigned so rashly. Thou hast heard
The horrors of resistance ; listen now
To the reverse. Consent to be my bride.
My rank and power will shield thy native vales
From the oppression which now desolates
The rest of Hayti ; thou fair maid, wilt be
The pledge of peace and faith. This little hand
Shall form a chain of concord, stronger far
Than all the gold which Hayti's isle can boast,
Though it were forged in links which might withstand
A giant's grasp. I know thou lov'st me not ;
I know the heart is gone whose wealth I sought ;
Yet doubt I not in time it would return
To its liege lord. Say, when thy homes are burned,
Thy friends, or dead or dying, lie around,
What then will it avail thee that this woe
Springs from thy love to one, who, far away,
Knows not the desolation he has caused ?

ALANA.

Roldan, you urge me cruelly. Alas !
I know your power ; I know my people's weakness.
But press not my decision ; give me proof

Of the devotion you so oft profess.
The summer moon is in her glory now ;
Wait till she vanishes, and the next moon
Uprears her slender horns. Be generous.
Leave me in peace till then. Grant me this boon,
And I will think it proves thy love as deep
As oft thou 'st sworn.

ROLDAN.

Alana, be it so.

Weigh well my words, nor deem them empty threats ;
For know, my head has never planned the deed
My hand was slow to execute. Farewell !

[Exit ROLDAN.]

ALANA.

I do believe thee. Not the incarnate fiend,
Whose doings oft I 've heard thy followers tell,
And tremble as they told, had less remorse
To do the evil deeds in which he joys,
Than thou and thine to follow in his steps.

(Reënter BEHECHIO and ANACAONA.)

ANACAONA.

Thy tyrant 's gone.

ALANA.

He has.

ANACAONA.

Thy tears attest

The harshness of his words.

BEHECHIO.

Poor, trembling maid,

Would I could save thee from the woes that hang
O'er our devoted race !

ALANA.

I 'm doomed to be
The foremost victim.

ANACAONA.

Say not so, my child !
The Alcalde's wooing 's harsh, yet by his threats
He means but to affright thee.

ALANA.

O mother, you are strangely blind !

BEHECHIO.

You 're right,
And you, Anacaona, wrong. Alas !
Will naught remove the film that from your eyes
Shrouds every danger ? Caonabo's death
You can excuse, can see your daughter wronged,
And vainly judge his enemies and hers
By your own purity of heart. 'T is woe
That thy own virtues must be made the snares
To entrap thee ! Yes, Alana, much I doubt
If aught but death can save thee from Roldan,
And should rejoice if thou couldst school thy heart
To hear his wooing patiently.

ALANA.

I 've gained
Some short delay, and promised, when the time
He 's granted at my suit shall have expired,
To answer, ay or no, his urgent suit.

BEHECHIO.

And if you answer, No ?

ALANA.

He threats with fire
And swift-avenging sword to desolate
The province.

BEHECHIO.

Doubt not he 'll perform his threat.

ANACAONA.

Why shouldst thou think so ? He has proved our friend.
But thou, Behechio, art as suspicious
As I am rash ; we should exchange our natures ;
The first should be the woman's fault ; the last
Is far too oft the man's. — My gentle one,
Thy sorrows are my own ! Thy every tear
Wrings my fond heart ! Would that I had the power
To banish thy distress, and give thee joy !

BEHECHIO.

Poor fated dove ! Thou must yield to the blast
Of power which howls around, and sweeps away
Our rights, our wealth, our homes, our hearts' best
treasures,
As they were autumn leaves ! Yes, thou must yield,
And wed Roldan, or wed with misery !

ALANA.

What greater misery than to be his wife ?

BEHECHIO.

Would it be less to see his threats fulfilled ?

ALANA.

Yet there 's one hope ! Guevara will return !

BEHECHIO.

Call'st thou that hope, to see thy lover fall
A victim to the Alcalde's rage ? 'T were best
For him and you he never should return.
Subdue these tears ; my words are meant in kindness.
Thou ne'er shouldst need to weep had I the power
To master these intruders. List my counsel ; —
'T is given in love and truth ; — forget Guevara —

ALANA.

Forget him ! Never ! Yet, my dearest friend,
Think me not wilful. Though Guevara's love
Is my sole happiness, could I but find
Some charm which from my memory could erase
His cherished image, gladly would I seize
Its aid. But no ! The blasts of time, of care,
Of withering sorrow, may pass o'er my heart,
Yet leave in its first power my youthful love !

BEHECHIO.

Ah, thou art young, and know not how the touch
Of time, of care, and sorrow can remove
Emotions which to youth seem everlasting !
This time alone can teach. But thou hast seen
What turmoil here Guevara's short sojourn
Produced ; — reflect what misery must ensue
From his return. Seek not to lure him back.
Roldan has wealth and power : his haughty heart

Thy charms have conquered, and thy voice can rule.
Is it not triumph to behold this man,
Before whom others tremble, kneel to thee,
And own thy word a law ? Resume that power.
One smile, one word of kindness, would subdue
His tiger mood.

ALANA.

Sooner I 'd die than wed him !

ANACAONA.

'T is cruelty to urge it ! No, my child ;
Fear not thou wilt be sacrificed ; some aid
Will yet arrive. So beautiful, so young,
Who could be steeled against thy misery ?

BEHECHIO.

It is her youth and beauty which are doomed
To cause that misery. But words are vain.
The storm which must o'erwhelm us darkly lowers
Above our heads. Too truly did my heart
Forewarn me that Guevara would become
The hastener of our doom, and its still voice
Is fatally attested ! If his steps
Again disturb our vales, the blood of those
Who through his fatal passion fall must rest
Upon his guilty head ; and may my curse
Cleave to his soul —

ALANA.

Hold ! Curse him not ! My love
Should shield Guevara from your wrath !

BEHECHIO.

Fond maid,

Thy woman's heart, which deems that all must yield
To its weak passion, cannot waste a thought
Upon the woes of others. Go ! enjoy
Thy dream of love ! Recall the Spanish youth,
And let his kiss banish the short-lived tears
My words call forth, while bleeding round thee lie
The hapless victims of thy selfish passion,
Whose dying eyes shall curse thee when their lips
Have lost the power of utterance ! [Exit BEHECHIO.

ANACAONA.

Woe is me !

Where'er I turn, dissension dogs my steps !
Wealth, power, and rank, and joy were lost to me
When false tongues lured my husband to his doom,
And now my only hope of happiness,
My loved Alana, droops. Ah, woe is me !
[Exit, leading ALANA.

SCENE II.

The forest near ANACAONA's cottage. Enter GUEVARA.

GUEVARA.

AND now methinks I 'm at the height of madness !
The man, who loses 'neath a foaming torrent
A gem of price, and straightway seeks the wave,

And vainly plunges to regain his treasure,
Is not more wild than I. I am resolved
Upon a desperate enterprise ; my life
Each moment is at stake, and I must hold
Both head and hand alert in its defence.
Not the loud thunder in its sternest peal,
Not the fierce lightning rushing to destroy,
Are more intent upon the work of death,
Or more relentless, than Roldan, if once
His will or interest spur him on. I come
To win or die. Not knightlike may I stand
And face my foe, but, like the treacherous thief,
Am fain to gain by stratagem my treasure.
Ah, yonder stands the bower where dwells my love !
Perchance in sleep Guevara is forgot ;
Perchance she wakes and weeps. I 'll summon her ;
A storm approaches, and no other roof
Must give me shelter.

(ALANA appears from the cottage.)

But she comes, uncalled.

I 'll play the eavesdropper, and, standing near,
Learn if she think of me. *[Conceals himself.]*

ALANA (coming forward).

I cannot sleep,
For cruel dreams make slumber horrible.
Wild clouds whirl o'er the moon, to whose decline
I look for joy. Guevara, dost thou too
Gaze with impatience on the slow career

Of yon pale orb ? Dost thou too count the hours
Which must elapse before another moon
Shall rise in the blue heavens, and guide thee back
To sad Alana ?

GUEVARA (*discovering himself*).

Let this fond embrace
Solve all thy doubts, and banish all thy sadness.

ALANA.

Guevara ! Here ! O, this is happiness !

GUEVARA.

Short-lived, I fear ; but it *is* happiness.
There 's care upon thy brow.

ALANA.

Nay, heed it not.
Say, how in safety have you reached me, how
Evaded the Alcalde's vigilance ?

GUEVARA.

Thy heart should tell thee how imperious Love
Fetters Time's wings. O, wearily the hours
Have passed since last we met, and my fond heart —
And proud as fond — no longer could submit
To banishment ! And for my safety, know
That Love inspires his votaries with wiles
No other power could teach.

ALANA.

How dost thou hope
To escape the Alcalde's eye ?

GUEVARA.

Thou, dearest maid,

Shalt aid to save thyself and me.

ALANA.

Say, how ?

What can I do ? Speak.

GUEVARA.

First, thy mother's love
Must screen me from my foe ; and, next, thy care
Must seek my trusty kinsman, De Moxica.

ALANA.

I 'll fly, Guevara, to perform thy will,
For fear some unseen chance should wreck my hopes,
Ere they are fairly launched upon this sea
Of doubt and danger. Enter thou the cot.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE III.

Another part of the forest. A violent storm ; thunder and lightning.

Enter a number of Spaniards.

FIRST SPANIARD.

THE saints protect us ! O, that I were safe
In Andalusia's vales ! Not all the gold
That e'er on Hayti's island has been found
Should tempt me back to face these hurricanes.

SECOND SPANIARD.

Ah, Madre de Dios ! another flash !

I 'm almost blinded ! Holy Mother, hear !
Save me this night, and to thy shrine I vow
Six waxen torches ! Virgin, save thy child !

FIRST SPANIARD.

And I on Saint Iago's shrine will place
An ounce of gold ! Sancte Iago, ora,
Ora pro nobis !

THIRD SPANIARD.

Think'st thou this wild storm
Can make the Alcalde tremble ?

FIRST SPANIARD.

He has cause,
As well as we who 've so long done his bidding.
If I can 'scape the dangers of this night,
I'll serve some leader of more tender conscience.

SECOND SPANIARD.

I ask no better leader than Roldan ;
But since he has submitted to Columbus,
And gained his office and his lands, I think
He plays the judge upon his ancient comrades,
Who fought for him when he was landless. Ah,
Another flash ! — another stunning peal !
Sure there 's some judgment in this hurricane !
Hark ye, my friends, you know the young Guevara ?

FIRST SPANIARD.

Ay, we do so ; of noble blood is he
As any in Castile, and ever bore him
Knightlike to high and low. But what of him ?

SECOND SPANIARD.

You know that jealousy moved the Alcalde
To banish him, and some have dared to whisper
That there was danger of foul play. Think you
He 's been despatched, and Heaven has sent this turmoil
To awe the guilty ?

FIRST SPANIARD.

Nay, comrade, Heaven forbid !

THIRD SPANIARD.

Perchance his wrathful spirit rides the blast !
Ave Maria ! guard thy votary !

SECOND SPANIARD.

Come, come, my friends ; we shall be needed elsewhere.
Let 's haste for shelter to the Alcalde's quarters.
The hurricane, I trust, has spared that, though
It has o'erthrown our frailer dwellings. Come !

[Exeunt Spaniards.]

(Enter BEHECHIO, followed by Indians.)

BEHECHIO.

Rage on, ye winds, and ye, terrific fires,
Seek our oppressors' hearts ! Sure Heaven in wrath
Hath moved earth, air, and water to avenge
The white man's crimes. Not in the memory
Of Hayti's oldest sons hath such wild war
Ere raged upon our island. Hated race !
All things combine to desolate our peace
While they remain. O, list, ye raging blasts !
Bear off upon your wings of might each trace

Of Spanish power, and I will bless your rage,
And glory in my devastated vales,
For hope and freedom will be ours again ! [Exeunt.

(Enter GUEVARA.)

GUEVARA.

With joy I marked each tint of daylight fade ;
With joy I marked the twilight usher in
The friendly night. But such a night ! Methinks
The fiends of hell shriek in the rushing blast,
And ride upon the lightning. Ah, a crash !
A shriek ! Alana's voice ! (ALANA rushes across.) Stay
thee, my love ;
What terror wings thy steps ?

ALANA.

Is 't thou, Guevara ?

I knew thee not, for haste and deadly fear
Bewildered me.

GUEVARA.

Forgive my ignorance
And blind impatience, which exposed thee thus
To storms and dangers.

ALANA.

See ! I am unharmed.

But as I hurried homeward, a tall tree,
Rent by the storm, shivered, and groaned, and fell
Just as I bounded past it. I have done
Thy errand safely. All is well prepared,
Thy kinsman bids me say. Near to my home,

And unsuspected by our foes, exists
A wondrous cave : there will I hide thee ; there
At night conduct thy kinsman and his friends.

[Thunder and lightning.]

GUEVARA.

The heavens seem rent asunder !

ALANA.

Save, O, save me !

GUEVARA.

My gentle one, could love's protecting arms
Ward off the storms of life, here wert thou safe.
But calm these fears, my love ; a forest maid
Should bear a stouter heart. That frightful shock
Has passed. Look up, and let us hie away.
Thou hast been fleet enough when I pursued,
My forest bird ! fly from the storm as fleetly.

[Exeunt.]

ACT V.

SCENE I. *In ROLDAN's dwelling. ROLDAN and DE ESCOBAR discovered.*

DE ESCOBAR.

HATH your suit prospered since your rival went ?

ROLDAN.

In time she may endure me. I confess
I much mistook this maid. She 's far more bold
Than her soft air bespeaks her. I supposed
A few harsh words would bend her to my will,
As bends the willow to the rushing blast,
But she withstands my threats with threats as dire.

DE ESCOBAR.

You will have other work anon.

ROLDAN.

How so ?

DE ESCOBAR.

Your dealing with Guevara has aroused
The wrath of many of your sometime friends,
Whose birth, like his, is noble. They complain
Of insult to Castilian blood, from one ——

ROLDAN.

Ne'er mouth it, man ! I know what thou wouldst say,
And value not these whims of birth. The first
Who raised this barrier of nobility,
To lord it o'er his brethren, must have been
Of race as low as they, and or by wealth
Or valiant deeds achieved this boasted rank.
'T is ever to the founder of their race
That nobles turn to boast their ancestry,
And therefore those whom Fortune aids to rise
Are, by their own confession, of more worth
Than those who take her favors by descent.
Think'st thou I care how my proud followers
May chafe against my will ? Ay, let them fret !
'T is but the streamlet dashing 'gainst the rock.

DE ESCOBAR.

'T is more. Your pardon, but I 've proved your friend.
I tell you, sullen brows and swelling hearts
Must not be urged too far, or rashly trusted.
These knights are men of action, prompt to ire,
Fierce to resent an insult to themselves
Or to their privilege, and this they deem
Outraged by De Guevara's banishment.

ROLDAN.

Dost thou expect me to recall Guevara,
And show these cavaliers my penitence
For following my own will instead of his ?

DE ESCOBAR.

You must both watch and soothe these murmurers.

BOLDAN.

And stoop to sue their pardon for this sin ?

DE ESCOBAR.

You could stoop low enough when interest
Required that you should win their aid ; and now
A little courtesy may well be spared
To those who 've served you bravely.

(*A soldier rushes in.*)

BOLDAN.

How is this ?

SOLDIER.

Angels protect us ! 'T was his ghost !

BOLDAN.

Whose ghost ?

Speak, quick, or I 'll despatch thy quaking soul
Forth from its earthly covering, that thou
Mayst ne'er fear ghost again ! What wouldst thou say ?

SOLDIER.

Señor, the blast o'erthrew my hut ; I fled,
But, by the horrors of the storm confused,
I knew not whither. Suddenly a flash
Showed me beneath the trees a stately form
With ghastly face ; — 't was Don Hernando's spectre !

BOLDAN.

Thou gaping idiot, dost thou neglect
A soldier's duty, — let a stranger pass thee

Without a challenge, — then with senseless clamor
And tales of ghosts think to blind scrutiny ?
Hence with thy fears ! Yet stay, where saw'st thou this ?

SOLDIER.

Between this and the princess' dwelling.

ROLDAN.

So !

It moved that way ?

SOLDIER.

My lord, I saw it sink

Into the earth.

ROLDAN.

Thou 'rt certain of the spot ?

SOLDIER.

I knew not where I was, until the lightning
Disclosed the cottage through the trees.

ROLDAN.

Keep safe

This wondrous vision. Breathe it not again,
Or, by my life, thy tongue shall pay the forfeit !
I would not have my trustier followers
Infected by thy fears. Go. Wait without. [*Exit soldier.*]
Guevara has returned ! Yon trembling fool
Has seen him. Why he prates thus of a spectre
I wonder much. Would it were so indeed !
This needs attention. — Sank into the earth ? —
I 've heard some whisper of a cavern, filled
With treasures of the tribe, nor heeded it.

But this new treasure must be looked to. We
Must learn what hopes he has. Don Adrian
Will know his covert. Cautiously, my friend,
Find if my soldiers have been tampered with.
At night yon fool shall guide us to the place
Of his encounter. We must find this cave.
Lose not an hour. You test these malecontents.
I'll to Anacaona's cottage, there
To seek this ghost that haunts my timid bride.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

Before ANACAONA'S dwelling. Enter ALANA from the cottage.

ALANA.

THE storm has long since passed, yet still I tremble
As when its fury raged. Guevara says
A forest girl should never know such fears ;
But Spaniard and Xaraguan last night
Trembled alike, nor blushed to own their terrors.

(*Enter ROLDAN.*)

ROLDAN.

Fair maid, methinks you would supplant the sun,
So bright your eyes are beaming, while his rays
Still sleep behind a night of clouds.

ALANA.

The storm

Struck horror to my heart. I could not rest,
Even when its fury ceased.

ROLDAN.

Would thou couldst know
The hurricane of love which in my breast
You doom to rage with unabated fury !

ALANA.

Must I remind you of your promise ?

ROLDAN.

No.

I have not yet transgressed it. When I said
I would not urge your answer, I reserved
A lover's privilege to plead my cause
And sue for favor. Have you ever thought
On our last meeting ?

ALANA.

Can you doubt it ?

ROLDAN.

Ay ;

'T was possible that some more welcome theme
Engrossed all place within your breast.

ALANA.

Ah, me !

Can he suspect ? There 's meaning in his eye.
I must appear unmoved. (*Aside.*) Did but my will
Hold even course with duty, I had thought
More deeply on that meeting ; as it is,
What could efface it from my memory ?

ROLDAN.

She shrinks beneath my glance. (*Aside.*) And I may
hope ?

ALANA.

Why shouldst thou seek my love, when maids as fair
Each moment meet thy view, who, proud as fair,
Would glory in thy choice.

ROLDAN.

Ah, stubborn girl !

You know your power, — know that my faithful heart
Is yours alone ; so scruple not to jest
Of those who cannot rival your young charms.

ALANA.

What shall I say ? The time is opportune
To affect submission, and thus turn aside
Suspicion, if he harbour it. Alas,
'T will be a bitter task ! (*Aside.*) Methinks, Roldan,
That flattery must be dear to Spanish dames,
Since you, who call yourself a plain, blunt warrior,
Invoke its aid so oft. A Haytien girl,
Used to sincerity, may be forgiven
For doubting.

ROLDAN.

Why, I 've wooed thee with soft words
And with harsh threats. What will subdue thy heart ?
Speak, and I pledge my soul to win the spell !

ALANA.

In truth, I could be grateful if your love

Were more like reason, nor so wildly varied ;
First seeking through my vanity to win,
And next to crush me by ungoverned fury.

ROLDAN.

And if I rule my conduct by your will ——

ALANA.

Nay, now your question overleaps your promise.
The moon has not yet waned.

ROLDAN.

Grant me one kiss,
A pledge of hope and sweet forgiveness ! (*She shrinks, and
turns away.*) Traitor !
Think'st thou I cannot pierce the shallow wiles
By which thou seek'st to blind me ? Tremble, girl !
I know Guevara has returned ; I know
Thy mother shelters him. He has abused
My former mercy, and his doom is sealed
By his and thy own folly. (*ALANA kneels to him.*) Off,
I say,
Nor hope I will relent !

ALANA.

Mercy, Roldan !
O, spare him ! Spare Guevara ! Wreak thy rage
Upon my head !

ROLDAN.

On thee ? No, thou shalt live
To glut my vengeance, — live to curse thy life !

ALANA.

It is already cursed, and I am cursed !
O, plant thy dagger in my heart, and take
My blessing !

ROLDAN.

Thou shalt live to bless my sight
With agonies that martyrs never knew.
Thy lover's corse shall blacken in thy view,
And thou shalt gaze upon him till thine eyes
Stiffen with horror.

ALANA.

O, be merciful !
Let but Guevara live, and any doom
Thou canst name for myself I will endure.

ROLDAN.

When you can pledge yourself to be my wife ——

ALANA.

O, no, no, no ! So great a sacrifice, —
Can I submit ? — O, whither shall I fly ?
Kinsmen and friends, where are ye ? O Guevara !

ROLDAN.

Alana, calm this frenzy. If to save
Guevara be your choice, swear to obey
My wishes. You are powerless. Think well.
Another hour shall see this dagger's point
Drenched in Guevara's blood. You tremble : swear !
Do you still hesitate ? Now, by the saints,
If I 'm not quick obeyed, thy rebel blood

Shall flow before Guevara's ! I 'll not brook
Longer to be a prey to woman's caprice.
One stroke shall set me free. [*She faints.*
So, my unruly tongue 's o'erleaped the mark,
And, 'stead of forcing her into compliance,
Has driven her senses from her. Sure my fate
Decrees this stubborn girl to be my curse !
[*Bears ALANA into the cottage.*

SCENE III.

The cavern. GUEVARA discovered, as just awakened from slumber.

GUEVARA.

HERE, like a beast of prey within his lair,
I couch, and sleep, and wait the friendly darkness,
Which brings me freedom and the breath of heaven.
I know not whether noon gleams in the sky,
Or night, with drooping lid, hangs o'er the earth ;
For, through my fevered dreams, my unchained thoughts
In minutes have performed the deeds of hours.
At last a sound invades my tomb ; a rustling
As of a young bird's wing among the boughs.

(*Enter ALANA.*)

'T is night, 't is night ; for, lo ! my evening star
Gleams through the shades, and makes this sepulchre
Her throne. O my beloved, I may look
Into thine eyes' pure light —— But how is this ?

No smile upon thy lip ? thy cheek's warm glow
Quite faded ? Speak ! I 'm tortured by such fears ——

ALANA.

We are betrayed !

GUEVARA.

Betrayed ? How ? When ? By whom ?

ALANA.

I know but this ; some dire, some fatal chance
Hath to Roldan disclosed thy bold return.
What demon hath he bought to track thy steps ?

GUEVARA.

This is some dream, some frenzy of thy fear.

ALANA.

Too true, too fearful.

GUEVARA.

Why am I still safe ?

ALANA.

Thank Heaven that even his keen, ferocious eye
Hath never reached this spot ! Here, on thy breast,
This very hour, let me expire, ere meet
Again his hated glance ! O my own love,
Such numbing terrors steal o'er my weak heart,
And chill my blood, I scarce can wish to live !

GUEVARA.

If my retreat is unsuspected, all
May yet be hoped. Shake off this withering dread ;
Think but of vengeance, liberty, and love.

ALANA.

O love and liberty ! — sweet hopes, sweet sounds,

That, 'mid the sunshine of my heart, breathed forth
All harmonies of life, all melodies
Of nature's voices, as in day's pure light
The birds pour forth their joyous carollings,
And thousand insects murmur their delights ;
But as the sun sinks, sink those pleasant notes ;
And as despair's dark night falls on my breast,
That music of my soul for ever dies !

GUEVARA.

My woodland flower, so tender and so fair,
Why must these blasts sweep o'er thy lovely head ?
Yet rouse thee, dear ; 't is treason to thy knight
To shrink and tremble when his arm enfolds thee.
Be firm awhile. How didst thou learn this danger ?

ALANA.

From his own lips, who makes thy presence danger ;
Who swore thy death, and pointed 'gainst my breast
His gleaming steel, to force me to receive
His loathsome love.

GUEVARA.

For vengeance, Heaven ! Speak on !

ALANA.

A welcome darkness, like the shades of death,
Hid all things from my sight and sense. I woke
Within my mother's arms. The fiend had fled.
Approaching night obscured the earth and sky.
With trembling step, yet cautious eye, I sped
To warn thee, and to weep within thine arms.

My rage is a devouring flame, that preys
Upon myself. When shall I give it vent
Upon this ravening wolf ? Alana, speak
Again my kinsman's message. Said he not
All was prepared ?

All, all !

This night

The tyrant dies ! — Yet what is death ? 'T is not
Revenge.

'T is all I ask, — 't is safety.

True.

But who guides De Moxica to this spot ?

My mother ; but a deeper darkness yet
Must make the attempt secure. Why didst thou rush
Upon such perils ?

For thy love, sweet maid,
Which makes the peril pastime. Thou, for mine,
Must rule thy fears and steel thy throbbing breast,
For if we win, the victory is thine ;
And if we fail, thou 'lt need to banish all
The woman from thy heart, or die of woe.

ALANA.

Ay, I behold thee now glorying in youth,
In strength and beauty, yet a few short hours
May banish the bright vision, — 't is too bright
To bless my fond eyes long ! Yes, thou mayst fail.
What then am I ? The Alcalde's hopeless slave, —
His wife ! Forbid it, Heaven ! Yet what escape ?

GUEVARA.

Save through the avenues of death there 's none.
Alana, my own love, thou hast believed
My vows of fond affection, and thy heart
Repays them all, but thou canst never know,
If I should fall, the frenzy of my passion, —
Know all that proves its deathless truth : high hopes
Of honor, rank, and fame, thy beaming glance
Hath far outshone, and now I stake my life,
And ask but one return, — thy promise, love,
Never to wed my enemy.

ALANA.

Think'st thou

I am so little mindful of my faith ?
Dost thou suspect my fears would so betray me ?
Or, trusting in my love, canst thou believe
I 'd live to wed another ?

GUEVARA.

Could I rest

Within my bloody grave if thou wert his ?
No ! earth should gape and give me forth again ;

A hideous spectre would I stand before thee,
And claim my bride. Then swear, my own Alana,
To be my own in death, nor crown the triumph
Of yon barbarian. (*Holds a cross before her.*) See ! this
holy sign
Of love and truth, I taught thee to adore.
Let thy first vow on it be for my sake,
Who gave thine eyes its light. Alana, kneel,
And let thy words call the Great Power to witness
Thy oath of faith.

ALANA.

Thy will is mine. I swear !

GUEVARA.

Be blessed, my gentle one, for thy sweet love,
Unsoiled by aught of this world's selfishness.
I hear a stealthy tread. My kinsman comes.
One kiss ! Now hie thee from this scene of gloom ;
Safe in thy cot await the rapturous hour
When I shall clasp thee in the face of day,
And tell of victory and happiness.

(*Enter ROLDAN.*)

ROLDAN.

That happiness be mine. How is 't, young sir,
You come uncalled ?

GUEVARA.

It was my will, Roldan !

ROLDAN.

Your will ! You take it boldly. Yet, Señor,

I have a warrant to pull down your pride.
And thou, young traitress, dearly shalt thou rue
Thine artful dealing. Nay, unclasp thine arms,
Soft captors of the knight ; nor think thy breast
Will shield him from my wrath.

GUEVARA.

Loose me, Alana !

ROLDAN.

Nay, wait thy friends' approach ! they are at hand,
And well equipped.

(REGUELME, DE MOXICA, and others enter, guarded.)

GUEVARA.

Thy life is gone, foul despot !

[*They fight, GUEVARA falls.*]

O life, and fame, and love ! — a fevered dream !
Must I die unrevenged ? — Ay, there 's my grief !
Alana, draw thou near, that I may look
My last on thee, and on the world I leave.
Both seem more lovely to my waning sight,
Than even my undimmed vision deemed them.

[*ALANA approaches GUEVARA.*]

ROLDAN.

Back !

Thou art my slave, — won, as yon traitor wished,
At the sword's point. Now kneel and sue for mercy !

ALANA.

Alcalde, I defy thee ! In my breast
The Carib spirit rises ! I am strong

In resolution to escape thy power !
Despair discards my fears ! Guevara, see !
I shrink not from my oath ! Now, if thou lov'st me,
Death shall not sever us ! — Thy dagger ! — quick !

GUEVARA.

To part from thee were death ; to die with thee
Is life. No more my spirit would delay,
But longs with thine to wing her upward flight,
Freed from the woes of earth. Dost thou not tremble ?

ALANA.

No ! There is but one tie. Haste, haste, my love !
Strike, ere that monster dares again approach !

GUEVARA.

Still let me gaze on thee ! My hand is weak
To mar thy loveliness ! (*Stabbing her.*) Thus art thou
saved !

(*Hurls the dagger towards ROLDAN, who groans and staggers back.*)

Behold a noble's vengeance !

ALANA.

See, Roldan,
The slave escapes thee ! Even thy iron hand
Cannot withdraw death's prey from his stern grasp.

[ANACAONA *rushes in with a shriek.*

That voice recalls me ! — Mother, I depart
Where Spaniards have no power ! Guevara, love,
Let thy last glance rest on me ! — Thou art gone !
I haste to follow thee !

[*Dies.*

(*Enter BEHECHIO.*)

BEHECHIO.

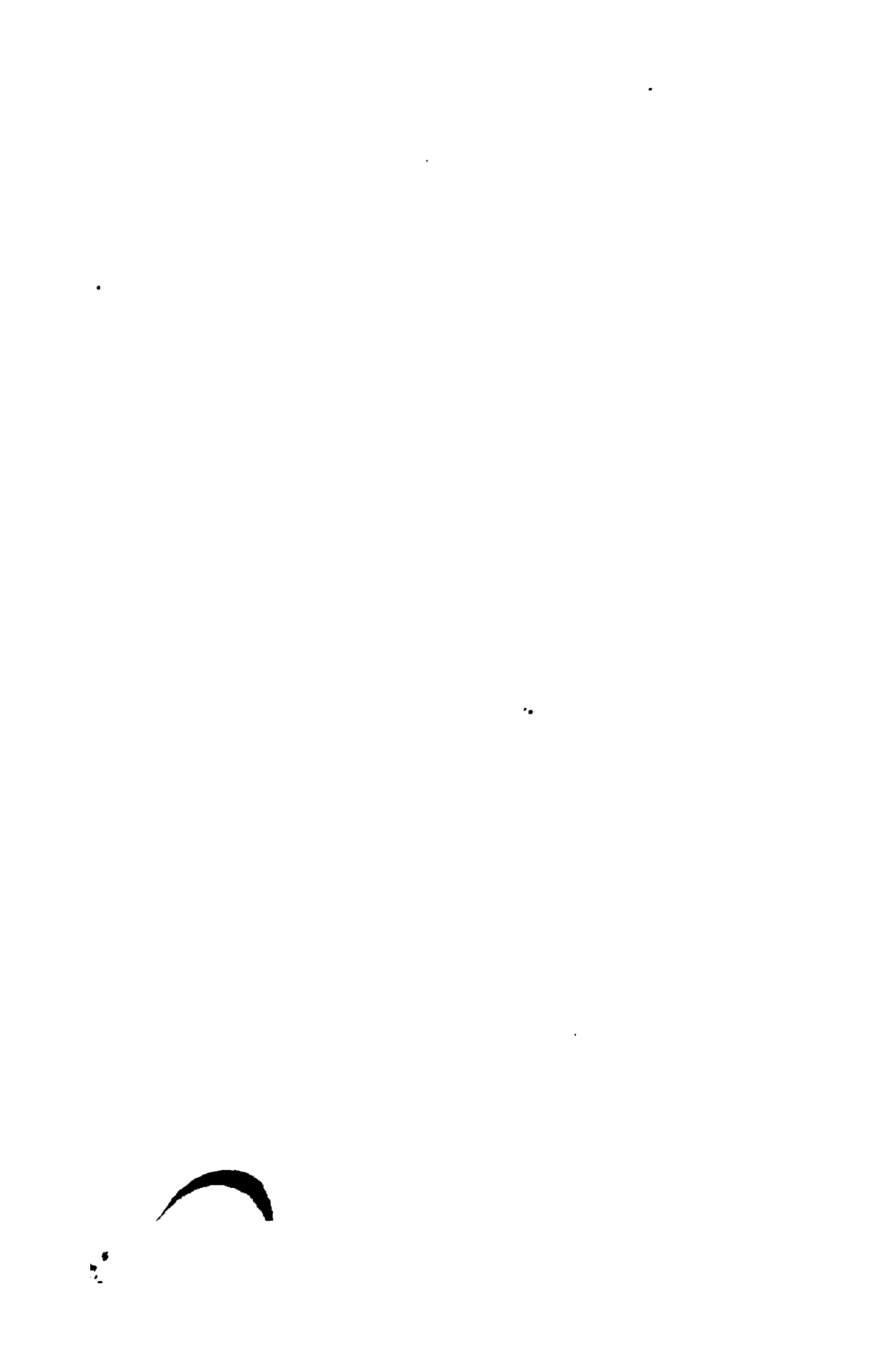
Thou widowed wife,
And childless mother, weep not ! Stay thy tears ;
And for each drop let countless curses fall
On the destroyers !

ANACAONA (*to the Spaniards*).

Ay, ye have ta'en all, —
All, — all Anacaona's treasures ! Now
Her life alone remains. Spaniards, take that,
For ye have made it desolate !

THE END.





Handwritten text, possibly a signature or name, written in cursive script.



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